Towards Harmony:
Connecting with God Through Participation in a Church Music Group

by

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Abstract
This study examines how church musical group participation nurtures the participant’s spiritual life. As a qualitative study it uses journals, interviews, and a group discussion to uncover themes relating to the participant’s experience as a choir or handbell choir member at Trinity United Church in Cobourg, Ontario. In gathering the musician’s narrative, themes were identified that showed the impact of musical group membership on the person’s spirituality. The study culminated in a group discussion, generating four statements on each of “music and community,” “making music,” “personal experience of music and spirituality” and “music ensembles in the church and worship.” Research in koinonia, small group ministry, music and sacramentality and music and spirituality is put in conversation with the findings. Those studied showed that their spiritual life was influenced by their relationships with other people in the group, the ability to fulfill their ministry and mission within the church, their ability to become absorbed in music making, and outreach into the greater community. Based on these findings, the author outlines implications for music ministry in the church, specifically regarding how musicians are ministered to in a church music group.
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1 Ministry context and research question

1.1 Context, Community and Music

Contemporary Western society is experiencing the effects of long and gradual shift towards greater individualism, which is of great concern to the church and to a healthy society. According to sociologist Anthony Giddens, in traditional societies, people were bound to a particular place and a local community. Since the eighteenth century, there has been a shift towards modernity, an emphasis on the individual, beginning with the invention of the clock, worldwide calendars and the exploration of sea travel.¹ Technology allows us to maintain relationships over large distances and for cultures to impact and trade with each other despite vast distances. More recently, postmodern developments such as the Internet and social media have allowed people to create and maintain “virtual” relationships without having to leave their homes. In spite of the connectivity of the World Wide Web, with its potential to democratize education and motivate initiatives for social justice, it simultaneously allows for increased social and cultural fragmentation. “The inherent insecurity of today’s knowledge combined with an awareness of and interaction with global others undermines the authority of tradition. Beliefs and values are no longer knit together in one system. Neither kin nor the local community determines the course of our lives – nor does religion.”² This shift towards individualism and fragmentation frequently results in a lack of commitment to local,


communal relationships, which in turn leads to a lack of commitment to volunteering, attending meetings, or getting involved in organizations—that is, an overall lack of loyalty to community. Robert Putnam, in *Bowling Alone*, shows that in the past 35 years, Americans are:

- 10-15 percent less likely to voice their views publicly by running for office or by writing Congress or the local newspaper;
- 15-20 percent less interested in politics and public affairs;
- 25 percent less likely to vote;
- 35 percent less likely to attend public meetings;
- 40 percent less involved in political and civic organizations in general

Although these are American statistics, in our global world, the same phenomenon is also occurring in Canada. Community organizations complain of declining numbers of volunteers and neighbours do not know the people who live beside them. Besides being a concern for an individual’s social and emotional health, this is a problem for the church. Historically, churches relied on the experience of community. From the earliest church communities of Corinth and Ephesus, Christians have gathered together to encourage one another in faith and worship God. Indeed, the sacrament of Communion is by its very name based in community. The people share *together* the bread and cup. Modern and postmodern sociocultural changes have eroded church attendance and commitment to Christian community. Indeed, there is a sense in which the church can be seen as increasingly counter-cultural. With a society that no longer values the joining together, *per se*, how does the church, based in the very idea of joining together, minister to the individual and show the value of Christian community?

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Related to such trends is the decline of communal singing in Western society. It is no longer the norm that families gather around the piano for a sing-a-long on Saturday night. Patrons do not regularly sing at the local pub. Nor do children spend hours singing skipping songs on the playground. This has drastically affected the quality of congregational singing and the comfort level of the people participating. Princeton Seminary, Director of Music, Martin Tel, observes, “Congregational singing has fallen on hard times . . . our culture is much more passive in the way we encounter music. Group Singing doesn’t happen much.”

Music has been reserved for the professional, or at least, the well trained amateur. “As technologies have developed over the last century, they have brought an ever-increasing flow of professionally produced singing into our most intimate spaces.” Ruth King Goddard suggests that as a result of artificial enhancements on recordings being played on our radios, televisions, over the internet and on personal music devices, we have come to expect an unrealistic ideal and do not appreciate the beauty or value of the average voice. With the decline in congregational singing, and rising expectations of quality, many churches have found the size of their choirs decreasing. Nevertheless, contemporary forces have not extinguished the desire to connect with others in community, and while society might be discouraging amateur music making, people still want to make music. “Creativity is not just for artists and music makers, it is a part of our humanity. Everybody, to one degree or another, is

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5 King Goddard, 84.

6 King Goddard, 90.
creative.” In order to combat issues around singing, some churches have started children’s choir programs to intentionally increase confidence from a young age or have created other musical ensembles like bands, orchestras, handbell choirs and drum circles. These ensembles both teach music, which gives confidence around music making, and provide musical opportunities to those who do not want to sing. Church music programs offer an antidote to community- and music-starvation, giving people the opportunity to make music together.

1.2 Research problem

The 1998 National Congregations Study in the United States asked participants: “Does your congregation have any choirs, choruses, or other musical groups that sing or perform on a regular basis?” The study found that 86.3% of congregations had a musical group as part of their worship services. The study also found that in 59.6% of churches had between 1 and 4 musical groups. These statistics show that music groups are quite prevalent in churches. I suggest that the popularity of musical groups in churches has as much to do with their impact on the participant musicians as it has to do with the style of worship or impact on the congregation.

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9 For the purpose of this thesis, the term musician refers to any person who is making music, whether they are in paid leadership (as the Minister of Music) or any member of a church music group (participant in choir or handbell choir).
As the Minister of Music at a United Church, much of my effort is focused on the preparation, rehearsal, performance and pastoral care of the congregation’s musical groups. Each of these groups contributes to Sunday worship and outreach opportunities in the community. Through these worship and outreach opportunities, the participants of the ensembles become music ministers themselves, offering their gifts and time to enrich the lives of others. Participation in the musical group is one of service and leadership. Contributing to the life of the church in this way surely enhances a musician’s sense of self-worth and purpose. However, existing literature does not explore how ministering musically to others connects a musician to God. In this study, I am interested not so much in the effectiveness of a choir in the worship service, nor the spiritual experience of the congregation when the choir sings, but in how music making allows musical group members to connect with God and how being a part of a group helps foster their faith.

Although it is generally assumed that musical group membership has some sort of positive effect on the participants, there has been little research into how church music groups minister to their own members. In 2009, Chorus America performed an impact study to determine the effects of choir membership on the choir members. Many different types of choirs were studied, and 38% of the respondents belonged to church choirs. The study found that for adults, characteristics of choir members included being avid supporters of the arts, having a high level of volunteerism, having a high level of engagement in civic activities and being good members of a team.10 However, this study

did not address the cause of these attributes – for instance, why are choir members good members of a team? It also leads to questions like “does music itself affect these attributes or would the results be similar if another non-musical group was surveyed?”

Most importantly in my context, this survey lacks information about how choir membership affects the participant’s faith life. I have been unable to find any studies that address this issue.

Clift and Hancock completed a study that examined the significance of choral singing for sustaining psychological well being. The study describes six “generative mechanisms” by which singing may impact on wellbeing and health: positive affect; focused attention; deep breathing; social support; cognitive stimulation and regular commitment.\(^{11}\) While this study begins to look at some of the causes of psychological effects on the singer, it does not address the musician’s spirituality or their connection to God. Also absent is any discussion of non-vocal groups, which are present in many churches. The examination of how church music programs acts as a ministry to the participants can offer important insights into music ministry. For example, it might suggest ways that the church and Music Ministers can run rehearsals, select music, provide support for musicians and plan worship so that the members of the choir are provided with an environment that nurtures their faith.

Jonathan Arnold published research in 2014 that asks why the performance of sacred music is thriving in a world where church attendance is in decline. Arnold interviewed composers and used data from interviews of deceased composers, interviewed conductors of both church and professional choirs, a theologian and a philosopher in order to explore why our “secular” society is saturated with sacred music and what that means for the people today. The study concludes that the listener of sacred music can experience a transformative, sacred experience regardless of venue (liturgy or concert) and that people crave this spiritual connection. “The experience will not give us scientific truths that we can take away as rational argument for, or against, the existence of the divine, but if we take the music seriously, we will be changed by what we have heard in a way that ultimately leads to the deepest truths of our reality: of joy, suffering, pain, loss, forgiveness, sacrifice, mortality and, ultimately, of love, which is God.”12 While Arnold’s study explores the connection between how music nurtures the spirituality of the listener, it does not explore the experience of the performer or how group membership nurtures faith life. It focuses not on how we can use music to minister to our churches, but on how sacred music itself can give people a spiritual experience whether in worship or concert. In interviewing members of the musical ensemble, rather than composers and conductors, I hope to gain an understanding of how church music programs are used as vehicles of ministry.

All art is contextual. The artist’s historical, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds, to name but a few dimensions, influence the subject and tone of the artwork, dance or

music. The background of the performer or listener alters the meaning of the art for each individual. “There is no such thing as unmediated access, as all music is related to our social beliefs and experiences.”

The physical performance space and the structure of the performance in which the music is performed also affect the perception of the art. Hearing the same piece of music in a worship service or in a concert program gives a different lens for the listener or the musician to experience the same piece of music. As such, this study will include some personal biographical information on the researcher and the participants in order to better understand their contextual lens, perceptions and any potential biases they may have.

My exploration of small musical groups is best understood as an expression of the transcendental model of contextual theology according to Stephen B. Bevan. My project seeks to understand the effects of church musical ensemble membership on the musician’s individual experience of God. The transcendental model focuses on the personal relationship with God rather than the transformative nature of the sacred Word. We see that each person has a different perspective and is at a different place in their relationship to God, depending on the experiences they have had, their age, and the trials they have been through. According to Bevans, in the transcendental model one forms an understanding of God “not by focusing on the essence of the gospel message or the content of tradition as such . . . Rather the starting point is transcendental, concerned with

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13 Arnold, 42.
14 Arnold, 46.
one’s own religious experience.”\footnote{Bevans, 104.} I think this transcendental model will be the most useful approach for seeking to identify the effects of musical groups on an individual and their faith.

Bevans also asserts that a “person doesn’t exist in a vacuum” and “one is determined at every turn by one’s context.”\footnote{Bevans, 104.} In a church’s music ministry, a musical group becomes an integral part of its members’ context. They can collaborate with others while developing their own theology. Making music together becomes part of a person’s life, both spiritually and socially, and the musical group becomes a community that supports its members, influencing each member on his or her individual journey. By exploring how and why sacred music develops a person’s interpersonal relationships and spirituality, I will draw conclusions on how church musical group membership nurtures the participants’ faith life in order to discover advantages to church musical group membership and how to best structure church music programs in order to minister to the participating musicians.

1.3 Researcher’s Narrative

I was born in Sussex, England in 1979 into a family of British parents and an older brother. I was baptized in a Methodist church and my parents would take me occasionally to the Sunday School program at the church. I do not remember my parents attending church while I was at Sunday School. In 1987, when I was seven years old, after my
father had lost his job in England, my family immigrated to Canada so that my father could find work. We found the community of Cobourg had a similar feel to our town in England and my father found a job easily. Despite only one or two attempts, we did not find a new church home in Cobourg and church was not part of our lives.

As a child from a non-church-going family, I always felt drawn to the church, and especially its music. I found that through singing and playing the piano I could escape my troubles and find a place of comfort, safety and love. Although I did not understand this transportation to be spiritual at the time, in retrospect, I believe that through making music, I was able to feel the presence of God and be held, comforted and cared for. When I was 16, I was literally called (by phone, without applying for the position) by a local Lutheran church to be their musician. Thrilled by the opportunity, I embraced the call and discovered an embrace in return – from both the church community and from God. I immediately had a sense of purpose and knew that I was supposed to be used by God in this way. Through music, and specifically making music in a church setting, I have grown in my faith and my relationship with God and the church. It is a privilege that in my work I can show others how they too can use music to develop and express their faith lives.

After high school, I pursued a Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education at the University of Toronto. Although I was a flute major, my interest in church music, and my part time job at a small Lutheran church, motivated me to take organ lessons. I began to sculpt my music education degree to complement my interest in church music, taking courses in choral conducting, liturgical studies and service planning. Upon graduation, my husband and I moved home to the Cobourg area. I began work at a Presbyterian
church in Peterborough. I still felt, due to my lack of Sunday school or confirmation classes, that I did not know enough about the Bible, the church or worship to be confident in my abilities as a church musician. This prompted me to pursue a Master of Arts in Church Music in a summer program at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Despite juggling babies, work and studies, I found this time intensely spiritual and enlightening. My visits to Ohio were like study retreats. My workplace changed once again, this time to the United Church of Canada, where I felt at home with the worship style and theology. I thought that this was where I would like my children to have their church home.

As the Minister of Music at Trinity United Church, my ministry is based around weekly rehearsals of my musical groups, worship preparation and execution, musical outreach in the community and the pastoral care of the musicians I work with and their families. These musicians are the real hands and voices of music ministry when they minister in turn to the congregation and community at large. The greatest influence on my understanding of music ministry has been the stories from congregational members and members of my musical groups about how participation in music has altered their perceptions and changed their lives. Spiritual connections established through music are life-giving for the participants. In my ministry at Trinity United, I have had a choir member with throat cancer, unable to sing, and a handbell ringer recovering from breast cancer surgery, unable to ring, who both attended weekly rehearsals anyway, and a djembe player who broke her hand but insisted on drumming with just one hand. If the music program had no effect on the shape of these musicians’ lives, and they were coming only to make music or out of a sense of duty, their presence in these situations
would be completely inexplicable. From the perspective of faith, I view their need to be present as evidence of the transformational work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Founding my handbell choir, Jubilate, has shown me what a caring and active community can be created among musicians. Through a shared faith and the shared experience of learning to create music, this group cares for one another as a family. They accompany one another through joy and sorrow, ringing bells to celebrate accomplishments and supporting each other in times of mourning. When the bell choir comes into rehearsals, they share the events of their lives with each other. In troubled times, they send cards, take food, and visit with one another. To celebrate and congratulate each other, such as on a wedding anniversary or the birth of a grandchild, one of my ringers will shout “random ring!” upon which everyone picks up two bells and makes a joyful noise!

Seeing musicians in my groups use the music program to build their relationships with God and each other has inspired me to wonder: in a church where music is such an integral part of its ministry, how does being involved in a church music group nurture the participant’s spiritual life?

1.4 Current context of ministry

Trinity United Church is a mid-sized, healthy United Church congregation in the town of Cobourg, Ontario. Trinity is the only United Church in a town of approximately 19,000 people. The Cobourg community is described as 70% Christian and 91% white according
to the 2011 Census. Although 2085 people identify their religion with the United Church and although Trinity United is the only United Church in the town, an average of 200 people from the Trinity worshipping community attend Sunday worship. There is a wide age demographic within the congregation—the majority are retired, but there are also many families with children. In 2014 the church undertook a Viability Study, which showed that 71% of the church membership was over the age of 65. The architectural and historical heritage of the church is Methodist, with an emphasis on preaching the Word and a lively acoustic so that the minister and choir are easily audible to the congregation. As such, the building, finished in its current form in 1901, features domed ceilings, a u-shaped balcony and a stepped chancel at the front of the church. The building’s history is a source of pride for the congregation and the emphasis on education, preaching and music is still very much part of the identity of the community.

Trinity is known as a centre for music in the community, through its own music programs, as a home for community music groups and as a concert venue. Trinity has had a long history of intentional music ministry. The music is considered crucial to the life, work, worship and mission of this congregation. In addition to the church’s large music

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program and creative use of music in worship, the church is home to many community organizations, including the Northumberland Orchestra and Choir, Shout Sisters Choir and La Jeunesse Youth Choirs. The sanctuary is used for concerts on a regular basis. Trinity understands my position as Minister of Music to be one not just of providing musical leadership, but also using music as an educational and pastoral tool for both children and adults in the congregation.

Weekly worship at Trinity centers around a theme derived from the Revised Common Lectionary readings.

Within The United Church of Canada there is a wide diversity of approaches to worship. From our beginnings the principle of unity in diversity has been a valued characteristic of our liturgical life. We have sought to maintain a healthy tension between order and liberty, structure and freedom. Structure can provide stability, accountability, and catholicity. Freedom can offer openness, creativity, and contextuality. Through both, the living Spirit works to ground and move the church.21

In keeping with this United Church ethos, worship at Trinity United tends to be multi-disciplinary. While many of the main liturgical components are consistent from week to week, the service order is also flexible. Each weekly service contains at least three hymns, congregational responses, a chancel choir anthem and a musical offering from one of the other Trinity ensembles. Effort is made to include a variety of musical styles including classical, world music, gospel, and contemporary Christian, with a mixture of organ and piano accompaniment.

Trinity employs two full time ministers and a part time Minister of Music, who meet biannually to develop a six-month calendar of events. During this meeting, the preacher for each Sunday presents the chosen theme and some hymn suggestions. After this meeting, the Minister of Music develops a music schedule, selecting choir anthems, handbell music, and larger works and establishing the schedule for each musical group. The team then meets weekly on a Tuesday morning to plan details for the upcoming Sunday’s worship service and fine-tune the bulletin. At this meeting, the order of items in the service, logistics of liturgical actions and the sanctuary set-up are discussed, and often hymns are changed.

As Minister of Music, in addition to working with the ministerial team to plan worship and accompany weekly services, I am responsible for leading two children’s choirs, the adult handbell choir and the Chancel Choir in weekly rehearsals. I also oversee the work of the youth handbell choir and a women’s trio (directed by volunteers) and work with other occasional ensembles, instrumentalists and soloists. In total, approximately 85 members of the Trinity United Church congregation attend rehearsals on a weekly basis.

Through my work with these groups, I have observed that members of these church music groups experience a deep connection to the church, God and each other through their participation in the music program. Their commitment to rehearsals, outreach, worship and quality music-making demonstrate that participating in church life in this way is a deeply meaningful and important part of their lives. Brynjulf Stige says, “Where
there is participation ‘in spite of’ there must be a strong ‘in order to.’”22 Anyone who participates in a church music group does so “in spite of” a host of obstacles. They participate in spite of transportation issues, the weather, a television special that is on, or more serious obstacles. Throughout my time as a Minister of Music I have had many singers sick with chronic or acute illnesses and unable to sing—yet still attending rehearsals. Clearly there is something significant about the experience of being involved in the group that makes it this important in the lives of these musicians. I am curious to discover the motivations of these members and how the music program is ministering to them.

1.5 Research Question

This project will examine how an individual’s experience of music in a church music group (choir, handbell choir) at Trinity United Church in Cobourg nurtures the participant’s spiritual life.

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2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In order to examine an individual’s experience of their church musical group it will be helpful to consider the meaning of spirituality and the spiritual life in this context. Three areas will be explored. The first, music and spirituality, will reflect on how music has been used as a means for an individual to connect with God throughout history. It is hoped that understanding the role of music as a channel to the spiritual may illuminate music’s role in the spiritual lives of my choristers and handbell ringers. Part of this discussion will examine the role that music and spirituality have in worship and the way music is tied to the emotions of the musician.

Next, research will be presented suggesting that music could be considered a form of sacramentality. As in the role of music and spirituality, music will be examined in terms of how the musician experiences God through music and is, as a result, transformed by the encounter. In particular, the study of music and its effect on people (music and emotion, memory and spirituality), and the study of secular musical group membership (music therapy and education theory) will be highlighted.

The third section will explore small group ministry as well as music and bonding under the theological construct of koinonia. A church musical group, as a small group in the church, has the potential to develop relationships between the church and God, the members of the church group and the church and the world. By connecting these fields of
study, I hope to develop theory that sheds light on how the experience of music in a church music group nurtures an individual’s spiritual life.

2.2 Spirituality

The term “spirituality” has many definitions and implied meanings. In general terms, spirituality can be thought of as that which is “in connection to humility, healing, the value of wholeness, self and collective empowerment, liberation and reclaiming the vitality of life.” This relates to one’s overall experience of quality of life. However, for the church, this definition is not enough. In the context of the church, spirituality must also address how these things flow from a connection to God. Simply put, George A. Lane defines spirituality as “any particular style of approach to union with God.” This broad definition can encompass both institutional religion (the church) and seeking the Divine outside of the institutional church (walking in the woods, meditation etc.), yet it still names God as the subject/object of connection. Acknowledging both definitions, Corinne Ware emphasizes a person’s attitudes and activities as they seek God:

“Spirituality often refers to those things that have to do with the intelligent and immaterial part of a person, the part that experiences the transcendent. It also can mean all those attitudes and activities that characterize one’s attempts to make connection with Deity.”

Acknowledging these differing perspectives on spirituality, I will be examining

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24 George A. Lane, Christian Spirituality (Chicago, IL: Argus, 1968), viii.

the second part of this definition as the musicians attempt to connect with God through their participation.

Many Christians feel that attending church helps them connect to God through formal worship, guidance and being a part of the church community. The United Church of Canada has assembled a working definition of spirituality. According to Irene Fullarton and Ann Fleming, spirituality is:

- A dynamic dimension of the Spirit of God within us – body, mind and soul
- That which calls us into relationship with God, self, community (others) and creation (environment) as we journey through life and beyond.
- That which calls us to explore our identity (who am I?), our purpose and place in living (why am I here?), and how we live our lives (What values do I hold?)
- That which calls us to prayer, worship, and enlightenment, and draws us into the mystery, wonder, awe, and an openness to God’s breaking through (grace).
- That which gives us awareness of God’s Presence and Grace in our lives, affirms our being, and empowers us to move from despair to hope, meaning and contentment.  

This definition, when placed in the context of church musical group participation, can raise such questions as: “How does participation affect one’s relationships with God, oneself, and others?” “How does participation change the way one’s life is lived?” or “How does this activity call the participant to prayer, enlightenment and draw us to God?” It is these questions that I will be exploring throughout my project. The United Church of Canada’s definition of spirituality coheres with other definitions in the literature and, moreover, offers specific examples to explore within my research. For this

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reason, I will adopt the United Church of Canada’s definition as my working definition of the term “spirituality.”

2.2.1 Music and Spirituality

If making music does indeed affect the spirituality of the music maker, it stands to reason that music itself contains within it an inherent spiritual element. Music is one means by which people express their spirituality, or to quote Don Saliers, “music is the language of the soul made audible.”\(^{27}\) The connection between music and the soul has been acknowledged for centuries. As far back as the fourth century, Anicius M. Boethius classified music into three types, one of which was \textit{musica humana} or music of the human soul.\(^{28}\) In this music, the soul’s singing is not necessarily audible, but indicates spiritual harmony within a person.

Music allows people to express what words alone cannot. St. Augustine is famously quoted in having stated, “he who sings, prays twice.”\(^{29}\) More recently, Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel suggested that when we make music “we attempt to convey what we see and cannot say;” that there is “a tension between what we can imagine and what we can put into words.”\(^{30}\) Music’s ability to add an experience of depth to our

\(^{27}\) Don Saliers and Emily Saliers, \textit{A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 35.

\(^{28}\) Thomas Christensen, \textit{The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 146.


\(^{30}\) Saliers and Saliers, \textit{A Song to Sing}, 170.
words through the rise and fall of melody, harmonies and rhythm touches us emotionally and spiritually on a deeper level than words alone. This deepening of understanding can be a source of revelation to us. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are many accounts of an atheist audience member or performer having a conversion experience during a concert hall performance of Handel’s Oratorio “Messiah” or another sacred work. Thus, music can be a medium to activate a person’s spirituality, and that faith can come before theological understanding. In the words of rock critic Greil Marcus, “words in songs are sounds we can feel before they are statements to understand.”

Conductor James Jordon has a slightly different understanding of how making music is connected to spirituality. While he does not deny that music can touch the listener and can express a person’s faith, he believes that a musician must first have a spiritual foundation in order to make meaningful music. In the introduction to his book, “The Musician’s Soul” he states, “this book is advocating some type of spiritual centering in one’s life as a prerequisite to music making.” While I believe that music is more beautiful and expresses more to the listener when the musician is emotionally, intellectually and spiritually engaged in the act, music-making can also be a means of discovering and developing the musician’s spirituality.

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32 James Jordon, The Musician’s Soul (Chicago: GIA, 1999), 22.
2.2.2 Music in Worship

Music is associated with the Divine in most world religions. Hindu temples use bells to call worshippers to worship. In Judaism, the shofar is used in a similar manner, and Buddhists use singing bowls to call on the Divine presence.\textsuperscript{33} Likewise, Christians use music for awakening, eliciting and sustaining states of consciousness in worship in addition to teaching, praying and confessing one’s own faith. Using music for worship in these ways suggests that we are using music to call on God. We want God to hear our music and make God’s presence known to us. However, Noirín Ní Riain proposes the opposite. “Man does not search out God, but rather the reverse is true. Sound is a real link to one’s Divine and human essence and to the yearning to be oneself. Only by such becoming can we be more unified and thus participate in the two-way dialogue in freedom, which God generously offers.”\textsuperscript{34} Through music, we search for ourselves, and in finding ourselves, we become more open to and discover God’s presence.

We know that worship is made more participatory and personal when the worshippers are given the opportunity to express their praise through song. “When worship is sung, it becomes more than a song: it is a confession of a truth, a gathering of as much of self as can be expressed in sincerity and proclaimed in public to God with a sense of privacy appropriate to personal communion.”\textsuperscript{35} The use of music in worship allows for both


\textsuperscript{35} Adnams, 191.
individual and corporate spirituality to be expressed and developed. Members of choirs and handbell choirs have a different experience in worship than the rest of the congregation. In sharing music with the church, they are providing leadership in worship, publicly proclaiming their faith, teaching, praying and using music as a medium that allows themselves and others to draw closer to God. These groups contribute to worship, offering their gifts and time to enrich the worship experience of others, however, existing literature does not explore the impacts of this ministry on the musicians themselves. I want to explore if—and if so, how—participating and sharing in worship in this way affects a musician’s relationship with God.

2.2.3 Music and Emotion

Music accompanies our daily lives, and marks special occasions. “Some sort of emotional experience is probably the main reason behind most people’s engagement with music.”\(^{36}\) As such, we have specific songs that our society uses to mark an occasion, as when “Auld Lang Syne” or a certain song brings back the memory of a specific time or event in our lives. A song on the radio may remind us of our high school formal, or a Christmas carol may bring back childhood memories. On many occasions throughout my ministry a person has commented after a Sunday service that they cry every time they sing one of that morning’s hymns, because it was used at a loved one’s funeral. “It’s not just the

music itself, but the context in which it is made and the collective or individual memories that are associated with that music that add to the spiritual power of music.”

The act of listening or making music can induce emotion in the listener/musician. People speak of being “swept away” by the music at a dance, concert or worship service. Many times when playing the piano, I am so moved by the emotion of the music that I become unaware of my physical surroundings or the passage of time. Robert H. Woody and Gary E. McPherson describe the sensation in this way: “A self-rewarding feeling of flow can be attained when people are so engaged in an activity that they lose self-consciousness, feel a merging of awareness and action, and even lose track of time.” They theorize that the emotional expression of the performer adds value to the life of the musician, inducing enjoyment and encouraging them to make music again. In terms of connecting with one’s spirituality, in this way, music can move performers into “another place, into an altered windscape of the mind, where the creative process sings freely out through the body. This is the sound of the body singing. And in spiritual terms it is the praising of God through a musical affirmation of being, no matter how tormented, no matter how joyous.”

It is in these moments that a musician can focus not on the notes, rhythms or technical aspects of music making but rather allow the creative process to open them to God’s presence or what God is saying. As music allows us to open up emotionally, it can be a source of revelation to us. According to Alice Fryling, such emotional feelings are spiritually

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significant. “Feelings are a source of information about how we view God, ourselves and others.”


41 Fryling, 57.

Jeremy Begbie states that people who grieve don’t want happy music to cheer them up, but rather “something that can both connect with their grief as it is and help them find new forms and depths of emotion, perhaps forms that help to set their sorrow in a larger, more hopeful emotional context, and in this way begin to re-form them.” It is for this reason that songs and instrumental music can be used as prayers. The act of singing a prayer rather than speaking it allows the person praying not only to petition God for healing, but also to fully express the emotion behind the petition at the same time.

In addition to music’s ability to evoke and communicate human emotion and promote healing through a release of that emotion when making music, psychologists have for many years studied the effect of rhythm on the body and spirit. In 1908 Dr. Roberto Assiogoli founded Psychosynthesis, a discipline of psychology that in part explores the use of rhythm and music for healing. “He notes that ancient people used the drum and rattle to increase the effectiveness of herbs and also used the instruments alone to provoke healing.” Assiogoli wrote that “rhythm is the element which has the most intense and immediate influence on man, and it affects directly both the body and the emotions.” Similarly, Dr. Carl E Seashore states that rhythm can both stimulate and relax the musician. From the heartbeat in the womb, to the physiology of our bodies, rhythm is an integral part of who we are. Seashore states that rhythm “is as much a part of our makeup as our respiratory or circulatory systems. Rhythm resonates in our

43 Saliers and Saliers, 126-127.
44 Begbie, 350.
emotions as well as our bodies. Thus when we listen to the thundering waves of the ocean or enjoy the rhythmic swaying of the trees in the wind, we are emotionally drawn into these scenes and feel ourselves part of them.”

Through music, the people of the church can express their faith, using music as a tool for praise, lament, and prayer. Such personal expression of faith and emotion gives voice, depth and meaning to a person’s individual spirituality.

### 2.3 Music and Sacramentality

If participating in music through listening or making music is a means to encounter God, then there is a sense in which the act of musical engagement can be seen as sacramental. The United Church of Canada defines a sacrament as “a symbolic action, or ritual, by which people of faith encounter the presence and goodness of God. In a sacrament, ordinary things like water, bread, and wine are used to point us to God and God’s love, reminding us of the sacred in life.” Although the United Church names only Baptism and Communion as official sacraments initiated by Jesus and identified in the Reformed and Methodist traditions, other acts of worship can be considered sacramental in nature. In this sense, participation in music, whether in listening or creating, has much in common with these sacraments. Here, the music, made with breath, bodies, and instruments are used to direct our attention towards God and allow people to experience

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47 Friedman, 41.

God during the musical experience. Richard Viladesau expresses a similar understanding in relation to religious art (including music): “To the extent that it attempts to give (always provisional and inadequate) form to the transcendental mystery, religious art may be described as being sacramental – in a general sense, referring to those acts by which the church expresses and realizes itself, in which it gives concrete form to its essence as the historical presence of God’s self-gift in Christ.”

Michael Driscoll says, “The arts, particularly music, are a potent means for coming into contact with the transcendent.” Viladesau explains that art gives us an opportunity to experience God in a unique way and mediates between God and us. To see the arts, and specifically music, in this light is helpful. Here music is a medium of communication – not only from one person to another, but between people and God. Viladesau’s framework for connecting with God through music is a helpful way to examine how music is used in worship. “Music can lead the mind to the sacred in three different but interconnected ways: by being the bearer or accompaniment to sacred words, gestures, or motions; by association with emotions characteristic of religious psychological states; and by the manifestation of beauty as the sign of the transcendental goal of human spirit.” The connection of music to ritual, emotion and beauty allows us to encounter the sacred.

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52 Viladesau, 43.
2.3.1 **Ritual**

Rituals form the basis of much of what we do in worship and in them provide an opportunity for sacramental encounter. By rituals we mean those stylized sequences of repetitively structured symbolic actions by which individuals and communities express deeply held cultural and spiritual beliefs and understanding. The study of ritual is a complex and still emerging field in anthropology, liturgy and cultural studies.\(^{53}\) “The rituals of the worshiping church are not guarantors of spiritual experience, but they are tested and trusted means by which we shape our gatherings so that people may be drawn to God.”\(^{54}\) Music is often wed to specific rituals, both in our daily lives and in worship. When we sing “Happy Birthday” before someone blows out their candles or sings the Sanctus as part of the Eucharistic Prayer, our music is married inseparably to the ritual. The music becomes a part of the ritual and deepens its meaning. At Trinity United Church, the congregation traditionally sings “The Lord bless thee and keep thee”\(^{55}\) at each baptism, as the minister walks up and down the aisles to present the child to the congregation. Here, tradition has attached the singing of this particular song to a ritual action; the congregation wants to and expects to sing this blessing at every infant baptism. The music allows the assembly to give voice to their welcome and blessing as

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\(^{53}\) Catherine Bell and Ron Grimes have done foundational work in this field. For example, see books Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in ritual studies*, Rev.ed. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).


the newly baptized child is presented. It nurtures a multi-dimensional engagement in the ritual of initiation and blessing, and thereby deepens the meaning of Baptism for the both congregants and the family of the newly baptized.

2.3.2 Emotion

We have already explored some of the ways in which music is connected to emotion, allowing the worshipper to connect to God. Emotion is one physical and cognitive way that the worshipper knows that they have come in contact with the Divine. Sacramentally understood, in worship our emotions signify more than just a reaction to past memory and present context; our emotions are a way for God to touch our hearts and reveal truth to us.

When we are engaged in worshipping God, the words are not merely ‘dressed out’ in sound; rather, we are formed in and give expression to those emotions and dispositions which govern the life of faith. Thus musical forms – especially though not exclusively texted musical forms – articulate communal emotions which the particular attributes of God and aspects of human life require.56

Music-making allows expression of the full range of human emotion, from the joy of our faith in God and the celebration of our lives in Jesus to our deepest laments. This collective outpouring of emotion from a worshipping community can deepen communion with each other and open us to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

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2.3.3 Beauty

A primary function of music in worship is to create beauty by offering the best we have to God. Don Saliers explores the non-verbal aspects of worship in his article “Sounding the Symbols of Faith.” He argues that when the community gathers, every sense, sound, taste, action, and sight has the potential to be “charged with the grandeur of God.”

Beauty, for many, can represent God. If God is the epitome of all things beautiful, surely we can sense, experience or see God in beautiful music, art, literature and architecture. We offer our very best to God, but it is not enough for us humans to attempt to imitate God’s beauty. We must adopt a more fully incarnational perspective. It is not simply through our efforts in worldly creations that we discover God but it is God’s beauty that is found in our art despite its flaws. “For the Christian message is not merely that God is lovely, but that God is love; not merely that God is beautiful and is to be found in the pursuit of what is attractive and desirable in the world, but that God is transcendentally and absolutely beautiful and is to be found even in what to the world’s eye is ugly and deformed and unworthy.”

As we create and experience art and music, we, through the Holy Spirit, come to see and know God working in and through our creations. It is then that we can understand true beauty. Although a group of professional singers singing sacred music can create a sound that is undeniably beautiful and technically excellent, there is also something special about a volunteer choir. Their sound, though not as

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59 Viladesau, 52-53.
refined, can, we hope, convey the genuine faith of the musicians and echo the whisperings of the Holy Spirit at work, opening up the congregation to a more intimate experience of God.

Thus, we understand that music as a dimension of ritual, a catalyst for emotion and a vehicle of beauty, can lead us into a sacramental encounter with God. As a result, something of God’s nature can be revealed.

2.3.4 Intentionality

Without denying that God can meet us unexpectedly, a person’s effort to spiritually experience or encounter God through music making will likely be helped by being both fully engaged in the task and open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Gordon Adnams goes so far as to argue that a vocalist must be “really worshipping, not just singing.” Adnams explains that sometimes people can be singing, but not conscious of the text or its meaning. “Singing in this state is not mindless; however, the singers are not minding their singing.” From this perspective, a musical group should strive to be intentional about making music, mindful of the text (if any), and focused on God, because “the sacramental quality of its music will always have much to do with the spirit in which it is offered.” Attentiveness to the musical worship experience and openness to God moving through the music allow for music to be incarnational. God can use human means (in this

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60 Adnams, 186.
61 Adnams, 187.
case, music) to further God’s will. “We make music, but God uses the music to move our minds if we are receptive.”

2.3.5 Transformation

“Music does not produce objects; it transforms subjects.”

In education theory there has been a shift from viewing learning as an acquisition of knowledge to a process where the student must first let go of what is preventing them from seeing what is important before they can learn. “In order to let go, or unlearn, the student usually engages in some form of spiritual practice.” Here, Miller is not referring to the term ‘spiritual’ as necessarily pertaining to God, but is instead using a definition similar to Corinne Ware’s definition of spirituality noted earlier: “the intelligent and immaterial part of a person, the part that experiences the transcendent.” Regardless, Miller’s theory of spiritual learning is applicable in the context of a person in a church music group. He outlines that mindfulness (being in the present), embracing awe and wonder, having compassion for others, focusing on joy, and being aware of changing thoughts and transformations are ways that the student can be aware of and initiate their own transformation. Likewise, when making music, the musician does well to try to let go of daily concerns, as well as the preoccupation with the mechanics of making music,

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63 Lancelot, 181.
64 Heaney, 220.
66 Miller, 97-100.
as a spiritual practice in order to connect with God. It is helpful for musicians to be as fully present as possible in their music making in order to be alert to hearing God’s voice and attentive to any dimensions of personal transformation that may occur while making music.

For people of faith, in worship the Holy Spirit certainly works through music. “The Spirit is the present active person of the Trinity, bringing people to faith, and to worship, and into Christian service.”67 As we participate in music and thus encounter God, the Holy Spirit uses our memories, personal references, and experiences to bring us to new realizations. As a result our lives, attitudes and actions are changed. “The Spirit blows where it will and reshapes the lives of those encountered. This is the kind of spiritual transformation that leads people to imitate Christ and to participate in the life of God.”68

Transformation also occurs after the worship service is over. When a person meets God in worship, that person is changed. If we acknowledge that music can be a means of sacramental encounter with God, we also understand that music making in worship transforms us. Lonergan’s theory of “intentional consciousness” delineates the human capacity of knowing into four stages: empirical, intellectual, rational and responsible.69 “In the first we experience, in the second we seek to understand what it is we experience, in the third we reflect on what has been understood to verify its truth and reality, and

67 Schmit, 32.
68 Schmit, 37.
69 Heaney, 150.
finally we decide on its value, and on what we are going to do with it.” Applying Lonergan’s theory of knowing to music, we first empirically experience the confluence of music, sound and spiritual connection. Second, intellectually, we remember what has happened. Music has a special connection with memory. A catchy tune can help us remember a text – a useful quality demonstrated by something as simple as the singing of the alphabet. In our spiritual lives, music allows us to carry sacred texts and theology with us throughout the week. Third, rationally, we reflect on the memory – asking ourselves “why does this matter?” and “how does this experience change what I am doing?” Lastly, responsibly, we make a decision to faithfully live out our experiences. With the new insights brought forth from our musical experiences in worship, we go into the world to live our lives differently, transformed towards God’s image.

Transformational worship can initiate change not just within the individual, but also within the community as a whole. Music in the liturgy is significant not just for the individual’s spiritual experience, but also for the unity of the church community.

“Communal singing simultaneously demands both sounding and listening, both receiving and giving, both self-awareness and attention to what is outside of self, both an inviting in and a giving out, all dialectics which are naturally paralleled by the cycle of inhaling and exhaling breath (of common air, of which there is plenty to go around), which moves in and out in a continuous, autonomic, communal loop.” As members of the church experience God in community, they gather a sense of embodied unity and, in addition, a

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70 Heaney, 150.

sense of God’s will for the work of the church. As a transformed community, made new through the sacramental encounter with God assisted by music-making, we are more equipped to venture out into our lives and to be the body of Christ in the world.

2.4 Music as Koinonia

The church, and more specifically, small groups in the church, can reconnect people with community. In contemporary society, even within Christianity, individualism reigns. Latini, in her book *The Church and the Crisis of Community*, suggests “We increasingly believe in God without belonging to God’s people.”72 Responding to today’s need for meaningful community, the Saddleback church in California is a megachurch with 3500 small groups. This is a church of small groups, where small groups are foundational to the church’s structure. Steve Gladen, a pastor of small groups at Saddleback, says “Christ like churches have one thing in common: they find a way to meet the needs of the people God has placed in their ministry areas. People are hungry for love, purpose, and life transformation, and I know of no better structure than a small group where this happens naturally and personally.”73

After all, according to Barth’s theology, relationship is at the root of God’s nature and purpose. “In Himself [God] does not will to exist for Himself, to exist alone. On the contrary, He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and therefore alive in His unique being with

72 Latini, 25.

and for and in another . . . He does not exist in solitude but in fellowship."\textsuperscript{74} Koinonia is literally translated from the Greek as “fellowship,” however; koinonia is more than simply a kindred social relationship. Many sources define koinonia as “an intimate bond of sharing that is established by participation in a shared reality.”\textsuperscript{75} In addition, “koinonia includes ‘mutual indwelling’, ‘participation’, ‘coinherence’ and ‘coexistence’.”\textsuperscript{76} Latini delineates five interlocking relationships that make up koinonia. This multidimensional koinonia is mediated by the Holy Spirit.

1. The koinonia of the Trinity. The Trinity is three unique individuals, in full relationship with one another.

2. The koinonia of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is fully human and fully Divine.

3. The koinonia between Christ and the church Through Jesus’ ministry, God creates a bond between God and people.

4. The koinonia among church members. Through Christ, Christians are joined to one another and the entire communion of saints.

5. The koinonia between the church and the world The church exists to serve the world, who, being human, are connected to God. \textsuperscript{77}

In direct contrast to contemporary society’s individualization and isolation, koinonia is about relationship. While each individual has a unique spiritual journey, one is not a Christian in isolation.\textsuperscript{78} “Personal faith journeys are just that, personal faith journeys. Paradoxically, personal faith journeys are never carried out alone. Whether we recognize


\textsuperscript{75} Rose Mary Dougherty, \textit{Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment} (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 8.

\textsuperscript{76} Latini, 76, quoting George Hunsinger.

\textsuperscript{77} Latini, 77.

\textsuperscript{78} Latini, 83.
it or not, we are always journeying with God. ‘We are not alone, we live in God’s world.’

God is ever-present. We are also always journeying with others. We make our way through life in community.”

79 This speaks to both the koinonia between Christ and the church (God is ever-present) and the koinonia among church members (journeying with others). As members of world and church, we live out our faith in the world, exhibiting the koinonia between the church (as members, not as an institution) and the world.

Koinonia of the Trinity and koinonia of the incarnate Jesus are more objective affirmations of Christian belief. We as humans can acknowledge these relationships, but cannot alter or engage them in the same way as in the three relationships of koinonia that directly involve us. Small groups are an excellent way of developing living relationships between the church and God, each other and the world. To understand how small groups minister to the individual, the church community and the wider world, we must examine how small groups affect a person’s own spiritual life and well-being, influence the congregation of which the group is a part, and relate to the wider world.

Music programs provide an opportunity for small group ministry in the church. Many churches already have musical ensembles in place. These groups meet regularly and assist in leading worship. In addition to liturgical implications, given the nature of music, a church’s music program also has an effect on the spirituality of its members. Significantly, musical groups are, by their very nature, based in relationship, making

79 Anne Martin, Rooted in the Divine: Nurturing Our Faith through Small Group Ministry (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2004), 8, quoting the United Church’s New Creed: “We are not alone . . . .”
them ideal for the development of koinonia. Christopher Small in his book *Musicking* emphasizes the significance of relationships in the act of music making.

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world.  

Choirs, handbell choirs and other musical ensembles can therefore assist in the unfolding koinonia between God and the church, between church members and between the church and the world.

2.4.1 Koinonia between the church and God

A discussion of koinonia between God and the people of God is fundamentally a discussion of personal (but not individualistic) relationships. Abigail Johnson explains “in forming humanity in the divine image, God made a special connection that draws us into personal relationship.”  

However, as previously acknowledged, one cannot have a relationship with God in a vacuum. The church can facilitate the koinonia between God and people through interpersonal encouragement.

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Just as “personal faith journeys are never carried out alone,”\(^{82}\) music making in the church is a communal activity. We have seen that at its heart, Christianity exists in relationship. “Belonging to God is both a personal and a communal experience, because we are called into relationship with God and with one another.”\(^{83}\) Likewise, music tends towards more than one person being involved. Music is arguably most rewarding when made in groups. Studies about secular musical ensembles have shown that participation contributes to a person’s concept of personal identity and to the collective identity of the group to which they belong.\(^{84}\) In a sacred setting, we can take this one step further. The spiritual purpose behind music in church adds another dimension to the musical experience. Participants in a church musical group develop self-identity, group identity and an awareness of the Divine. This is particularly significant. The development of personal spirituality, the identity of the church and our connection to God can all be expanded through musical group participation. This koinonia between people and God—the key difference between secular music groups and church-based music groups—allows church music participants to encounter God through their musical creation.

Margaret Warja describes two different ways to engage spiritually through music. “Receptive” musical engagement involves reflection on imagery, artwork or storytelling while listening to music. “Expressive” musical engagement uses the creation of music to

\(^{82}\) Martin, 8.

\(^{83}\) Johnson, 7.

\(^{84}\) Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (Sheffield: Ashgate, 2005), 31.
assist in meditation.\textsuperscript{85} Both of these are useful ways to elicit spiritual engagement. In a church musical group the participants experience “expressive” musical engagement, whereas the congregation experiences “receptive” engagement as they listen. It stands to reason that improvised music is a primary example of “expressive” engagement. Improvisation can be an important way of expressing oneself and responding to God’s Word. It can even lead us to revelation. In \textit{Awakening the Creative Spirit}, Betsey Beckman asks us to “consider the possibility that a primary way we can experience the revelation of God’s mystery is through the process of our own creative expression.”\textsuperscript{86} For example, at Trinity United, we have used a drum circle for this type of music-making. The group met once a month for a time of meditation on scripture, prayer and discernment. No previous musical training was required, just a desire to use self-expression and togetherness to open the doorways of revelation between God and the church. The improvised multi-layering of rhythms from each participant created a whole greater than the sum of the parts. Gathering together refocused each participant on their own connection with God, with music drawing the church and God closer in koinonia.

However, the vast majority of church music groups do not improvise. Church choirs, handbell choirs and praise bands make music from printed scores, charts or lead sheets. How then do these musicians experience koinonia with God and the church? Although these musicians recreate their own interpretation of a pre-composed piece instead of creating it in its entirety, the result is much the same. For the musicians in church music

\textsuperscript{85} Christine Walters Paintner and Betsey Beckman, \textit{Awakening the Creative Spirits: Bringing the Arts to Spiritual Direction} (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2010), 95.

\textsuperscript{86} Paintner and Beckman, 3.
groups, the rehearsal process is as important as Sunday worship. It is during rehearsal that they participate in small group ministry. Christine Valters Paintner describes the “pilgrimage of the art making process.”\textsuperscript{87} Our culture is very product oriented, however the process of making and developing art is just as important as the product, the final art piece. Likewise, the music rehearsal is as important as the performance. In rehearsal a person can learn and discover aspects of themselves as artists and people in addition to discerning God’s will.

2.4.2 Koinonia among church members

The Bible is filled with passages showing God’s desire for people to live in unity with each other. “Jesus prays his prayer for ‘oneing’ in us: May they all be one, may they be one as we are one.”\textsuperscript{88} Of course, this ‘oneing’ is not simply political or economic peace and fairness (although it certainly includes it), but rather harmonious living with people from all times and places—with the entire communion of saints. “Believers are united to each other, belonging first to each other, not to the countries in which they live. But the communion of saints is not merely global in reach. Koinonia means that the church belongs to and participates in the life of believers from all places and times - past, present and future.”\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{87} Paintner and Beckman, 17.
\textsuperscript{88} Dougherty, 13.
\textsuperscript{89} Latini, 90.
Congregational song joins us together in the communion of saints through historic hymns and with the wider church through global song. But what of the immediate church community and direct interpersonal koinonia? Here, musical groups offer an excellent opportunity for koinonia. To make music together requires communication and a sense of community. Through the rehearsal process, boundaries and relationships are established. The members of a musical group learn, struggle and celebrate together, sharing their humanity and vulnerability as they make music. Combined with the emotional response to the music itself, this can create an emotionally charged experience and sense of community, building relationships between the musicians. The sense of camaraderie from learning and playing or singing together, with the friendships and pastoral relationships that develop within the musical group, build up the spiritual life and well-being of the participants and the entire congregation.

2.4.2.1 Musical Participation and Bonding

“People feel they belong to a faith community when they are recognized and known by name, when they feel they are making a contribution to the community, and when their experiences, thoughts, and feelings are valued.”

Musical participation is a particularly good tool for bonding. *Valuing Musical Participation* describes case studies performed to determine the effects of music making through individual and group participation in Gilbert and Sullivan societies. “Making music with others was shown to affirm a sense of belonging and like-minded endeavor, so sustaining commitment and offering a shared

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90 Johnson, 92.
experience that fostered memories and friendships among a diverse group of people.\textsuperscript{91} In addition to simply having common interests, the nature of creating music itself may have a communal physiological effect on the participants. “Gage Averill suggests that the physical vibrations of closely harmonized singing create a close personal and musical connection amongst participants: ‘the relationship of the internalizing and externalizing of the self and of others in collective musical encounters encourages the production of a powerful, greater sense of solidarity and unity’.\textsuperscript{92}

Just as in 1 Corinthians 12 there are many parts, but one body, each member of the group is critical to the whole. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says “you are the body of Christ and individually members in it.” In creating music with others, the efforts of team members combine to create a new, complete work of art that could not be created by any one individual. An SATB anthem would be incomplete without the alto. Handbell music would be incomplete without a ringer for F and G. Each individual is important and contributes to the whole. The result of the sum of the parts is not merely completeness but sometimes a transcendent experience for the musicians. In the research by R. A. Stebbins in \textit{The Barbershop Singer: Inside the Social World of a Musical Hobby}, a singer describes their experience of being carried away and swallowed up in the chords as they are sung.\textsuperscript{93} As Stephanie Pitts describes, “This singer has experienced the sensation of being part of a musical sound that surpasses the individual contributions of the

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\textsuperscript{91} Pitts, 53.
\textsuperscript{92} Pitts, 63.
\textsuperscript{93} Robert A. Stebbins, \textit{The Barbershop Singer: Inside the Social World of a Musical Hobby} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 64.
\end{flushright}
participants and takes on an identity of its own.” It is this amalgamation of effort and sound that gives a group a unified identity as the members realize that they can do more together than they could ever do as individuals. This in turn opens the door to the group bonding together as one body of the church.

2.4.2.2 Rehearsals: Mid-week Ministry

Music therapy places greater emphasis on the music making process than on the final musical product. “In music therapy there is an interest in human interaction through music and not just in the organism’s reaction to music. Music therapy practice therefore often focuses upon human expression and communication.” Gary Ansdell completed a case study on an initiative in East London that provides training and social opportunities for adults experiencing mental health problems. The group “Musical Minds” of approximately 8 members meets weekly to “make and share music together with opportunities for solo and group activity. The group aims to prepare for and organize regular performances as well as musical fellowship.” Over time, the rehearsal process has changed the group. The director Sarah states that when she “first came to the group people would simply want to do their own thing (‘be a soloist’), could hardly listen to each other, and then would argue about not respecting each other, or being unable to

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94 Pitts, 63.
95 Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 3.
96 Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 34.
practically coordinate the concerts they want to do together.”97 “Gradually there has been more collaboration – both musically and socially.” She also states, “As I’m pushing them together musically they’re becoming better at feeling individuals!”98 Each week, both the social and music processes help these people travel through life, as they develop skills and relationships with one another. In a similar way, in church music groups the rehearsal process is as important to the spiritual development of the participant as the presentation of the learnt music in worship. Through the development of koinonia between the members of the group, the participant feels closer connected to God and to the church.

Mid-week meetings also allow for the members of the church to become a community in a way that Sunday mornings by themselves do not.99 However, a small group in the church is different from a community group or organization. “It exists as a community not for its own sake but the redemptive purpose of God.”100 The koinonia among members of the group is more than just social bonding. We come together to support one another and our relationships with God, not merely to share a common interest. This allows for a diverse group of people (gender, age, etc.) to be in the same small group. In a musical group, participants enter into a “musical fellowship,”101 where music transcends differences as people are joined together. In the church, participants in musical groups develop pastoral relationships with one another. I suggest that these pastoral relationships

97 Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 36.

98 Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 34.


100 Day, 33.

101 Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 34.
are enhanced by the common purpose of the group: to minister to the larger church and the world.

One cannot underestimate the importance of community. A group that makes music together as a “musical fellowship” becomes a community that cares for one another. A choir or other musical group cares for its members by sending cards for celebration or condolence, visiting sick members, and praying for each other. Praying with and for each other is perhaps the truest state of koinonia with each other and with God.

2.4.3 Koinonia between church and the world

The Koinonia between the church and the world can be strengthened both personally by the members of the musical group through their participation, and by the group as a whole. Each member of the church has gifts for ministry. As in any area of the church, the music program is made up of a diverse group of people, each with their own skills and talents. These abilities including making music, keeping track of sick members, leading devotions or prayers, making food for the group, or organizing fundraising are all gifts from God. “These gifts have been given to us so that we may fulfill our vocation as people of God.”

People are looking to find purpose in their lives through utilizing their gifts and finding their call. Some people are able to exercise their gifts for ministry through their paid work, while others look to the church or community to live out their

102 Johnson, 11.
ministry. The church music group offers a place where many people find they can offer their gifts of music to find purpose for themselves, the church and the greater community.

The function of the group, however, is not solely as an outlet for individual ministry. The group can also have a common purpose that extends into the world. “Ministry is the response to God’s love and the desire to live out of that love within the world. Ministry is experiential, relational and transformative.” Music making also possesses these three qualities, making it an ideal tool for ministry. As we have seen, it is experiential—an active, creative process. It is relational, among participants and between musicians and listeners. Lastly, it is transformative, as we have seen in music therapy. Thus, as an experiential, relational and transformative medium, music provides an excellent tool for ministry to the participants, church and world.

2.4.3.1 Experiential Ministry

Music is experiential. Christopher Small asserts that music is not a noun, but a verb. “Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do.” He argues that it is the experience of the performer and the listener that give music meaning. The act of musicking, existing only for the moments that it is created and/or heard, is the real “music,” as opposed to a printed score sitting on a shelf, which has no meaning unless it is partnered with musicking. Musicking together, church music groups can’t help but

103 Johnson, 12-13.
104 Martin, 15.
105 Small, 2.
have a strong common experience. This common experience gives focus and mission to the group so that they can show God’s love through music.

It is entirely possible for a small group to become isolated within a congregation. The danger is that the group becomes a clique, withdrawing into itself. It is important for small groups to participate in the larger work of the congregation, both within the local church, the wider church and the world. However, because of the regularity of meetings (once a week) and regular attendance in worship (at Trinity, choir members tend to be very regular church-goers, partly because the choir sings each week in worship), members of the Trinity United church music groups tend to be very involved in the life of the congregation. Many choir members serve on church committees and participate in programs and events in the church. Their leadership in worship gives them a sense of ownership in the life and work of the church and mitigates tendencies towards cliquishness.

2.4.3.2 Relational Ministry

Anne Martin explains that in relationships, there is giving and taking. “As one develops in God’s love, one feels more strongly the lure of God’s call to action, to give of one’s self.” Also, “[w]e grow by being open to the world, by our willingness to be in relation with others and learn from them.” For the church to be in koinonia with the world, we must be in a relationship of give and take with the world and the greater church.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{106}}\text{ Martin, 15.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{107}}\text{ Martin, 15.}\]
Music provides opportunity for ecumenical collaboration and for the sharing of our resources. Churches that do not have their own music programs can benefit from having groups from other churches visit and contribute to their worship services, fundraisers, or community events. The Trinity United youth bell choir, Jubilate Junior, visits rural churches that do not have bells or many youth. Ringing in their worship services gives the local church a new worship experience and connects the congregation to the greater church. Another opportunity for creating koinonia between churches is joint projects. Music can be a uniting force between denominations. We share many hymns and songs with other churches and massed choirs and ecumenical musical events can unite the church. The Trinity United chancel choir has participated in workshops, massed choir festivals and special events at other churches.

Church musical groups can reach out beyond their congregation, showing God’s love to the greater community. Church music groups can participate in community concerts and work in collaboration with artists, bringing them in for public concerts or other events. Working with outside groups can be mutually beneficial and allows the church to have relational ministry, increasing koinonia between the church and the world.

2.4.3.3 Transformative Ministry

Ministry is both transformative to the individual participant and the wider community in which the person lives. These personal and communal transformations can be triggered by music in any number of styles, for as we have seen, it is the contextual, emotional and spiritual background of the musician or listener that prepares a person for a sacramental
encounter through music. “In other words, it is not so much in the styles of music, or how they are listened to and received, but in the very *making* of music that we will find our universal keys to understanding music from a theological perspective”108 A person, changed through participation in small group ministry, can affect their community in many ways. For example, a choir member may gain a new understanding of God through their participation in choir. Their individual transformation will spill over from their musical activities, affecting the way they interact with family, work and those in need. A small group’s ministry goes beyond the walls of a church building, as members of small groups, including church music groups, use their gifts and experiences to enrich, influence and transform the wider community. “Consciousness raising, education, and commitment to challenge unjust social structures are all ways of ministering to the wider world.”109

108 Heaney, 100.

109 Martin, 17.
3 Research Methodology and Design

This project took the form of a phenomenological study according to John Creswell in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Creswell describes a phenomenological study as looking to describe the essence of an experience, grounding a theory in the view of the participants. As such, I have focused on discovering how an individual’s experience of music and koinonia in a church music group influences the participant’s spiritual life. Each of my participants shares the same phenomenon of church musical group participation and the study looked to illuminate what people experience spiritually through their involvement. I expected to see that both the act of music making, group involvement and desire to work towards the mission of the church are key motivating factors in participation and in developing a relationship with God. I hoped to hear stories and examples of how church music groups can minister to their members and enrich their spiritual lives.

In order to obtain this information, I used journal entries to collect recent experiences and in-depth interviews to collect pivotal experiences in a person’s experience in choir or handbell choir. The people that had been interviewed then, as a group, used the data gained from the first two methods to validate the data and offer additional thoughts or reflections that are illuminated through a group discussion.

In each of my collection methods, care was taken to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The participants’ names are kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I am the only person that was present for the interviews and the only person who listened to the recordings. For the examples and quotes I include in my thesis, I have used pseudonyms for all participants.

Recordings were made for the interviews and community reflection. The recordings are digital and were immediately transferred to safe storage on an encrypted USB key and deleted from the recording device. Recordings and written material will be kept until one year after completion of the degree. Digital files are stored on an encrypted USB drive. Both the USB key and the paper files (journal entries) are locked in a fire safe box in my home. After the year, they will be destroyed.

3.1 Journal

A letter of explanation and consent was handed out to each member of my choir and handbell choir (Appendix C). Each member was invited to journal after a rehearsal or worship service that they have participated in over a six-week span. Participation was completely voluntary. The journal entries consist of responses to a set of questions or prompts as seen in Appendix A and B. Care was taken to ensure participants that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers, that all contributions are of value to the study, and anonymity of all participants was to be observed in the findings of the study. The hope was that writing about recent events would produce specific examples about how making music in a church group affects their lives. This also introduces the participants to
thinking about the relationship between church music group participation and spirituality.

This opportunity was open to any member of the Trinity United Chancel Choir or Jubilate Handbell Choir who wished to participate.

3.2 In depth interviews

From the eighteen journaling participants, four members of my choir and handbell choir were selected to participate in 2 interviews, one week apart, each of about an hour in length. I decided to select 2 people each from the chancel choir and the handbell choir to gain complementary perspectives within each ensemble. They were chosen to make the best use of the available diversity in terms of age, gender, musical background, length of time at Trinity United and to present a variety of spiritual perspectives, which I gleaned from personal knowledge of the people and from their journals. I had planned to interview 4-6 people for the study, and intentionally chose only four to allow more in-depth conversations with each participant, including meeting with each of them twice.

There were also practical considerations, i.e. the amount of data. The interviews for these 4 people generated 9 hours of recordings and 111 pages of transcripts. I feel that the size of the study group was sufficient to meet my objectives. Certainly the responses in the “community reflections” group confirmed their capacity to represent the larger group as the diverse sample of 4 validated the themes and findings.

Each participant received a letter of consent as seen in Appendix D. I conducted the interviews one on one in my church office, except for one interview, which was conducted at the participant’s workplace in a private area.
The questions for the initial interview can be found in Appendix E. The in-depth interviews provided opportunity for long-form stories to emerge. The journaling provided specific examples over a snapshot in time, whereas the interviews allowed for more formative or past experiences to be explored.

After the initial interview, I transcribed the interview and notes were made to guide the second interview. The second interview allowed for clarification and questions from points made in the first interview and allowed for the interviewee to reflect further during the week between interviews. Having a second interview proved very important as participants commented on what they had been thinking about, asked questions and clarified points they had made the week before. Questions of clarification or further reflection for the second interview emerged for the interviewer upon review of the first interview.

3.3 Community Reflections

After analyzing the data from the journals and interviews, I convened a community reflection meeting, gathering together those who have been interviewed. I presented some of my initial thoughts and findings to the group of people that I interviewed. The group then gave feedback and discussed the ideas presented. Themes from my findings were grouped into four categories, which emerged from the data:

- Music Ensembles and Community
- Making Music
- Personal Experience of Music and Spirituality
- Music Ensembles in the Church and Worship.
Sub themes were then placed on pieces of paper around the room with an “I statement” explaining the theme. For example, one piece of paper read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community of Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being in a church music group provides me with a community of support and allows me to support others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each category had between five and seven themes. The participants were then asked to go and stand in front of a theme that they wished to speak about, whether it was to agree with the statement or to offer an opposing viewpoint. Each person then presented their theme and the group discussed the topic. Participants were allowed to pick the same theme as someone else. After the selected themes had been discussed, the group also discussed each of the other themes. Following the discussion of each category, the group created a statement that summarized the category. This discussion served to validate the data and provided new insights when the people discuss the concepts with one another. The session was recorded and transcribed.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed according to Tim Sensing’s description of coding in his book *Qualitative Research.* The process started with open coding, identifying the main ideas

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presented in the data and then axial coding was used to categorize the open codes into a more manageable number and identify key themes.

The table in Appendix F gives a detailed summary of 58 themes that the participants expressed, and shows that not all of the themes were present in any one person’s experience. For example, all spoke of the need for a safe place in music making, three of the four spoke of the experience of transformation, two spoke of the value of meditation, while only one did not feel their participation in music groups affected their relationship with God. With that one exception, all themes were shared by at least two people.

In summary:

**Journals**
1. Collected journal entries
2. Read data to get a sense of themes or main ideas
3. Open coded journal entries - writing codes beside the text in a column
4. Use axial coding to group open codes into larger themes
5. Created a list of axial codes created and reorganized data under each code

**Interviews**
1. Made transcripts from audio recordings from interviews
2. Re-read data
3. Open coded interviews – writing codes beside the text in a column
4. Identified statements by (Person number – interview number — page in transcript)
5. Used axial coding to group open codes into larger themes
6. Created a list of axial codes created and reorganize data under each code

At this point I compared the axial coding in the journals and interviews and group into one final level of coding.

Community Reflections

1. Presented code findings to the group
2. Created a transcript from the audio recording of the group discussion and group summary statements
3. Coded the data according to the axial themes (second level)
4. Observed slippage and silences (identified other themes)

Final Analysis

1. Altered codes established after the journal/interview analysis
2. Presented and analyzed data in conversation with the theory articulated in the literature review and research of this study

3.5 Limitations and Risks

Adnams suggested that singers should be “really worshipping, not just singing.”\textsuperscript{112} While a person may not necessarily be seeking a spiritual experience every time they sing, they must be present in the musical experience in order to have any sort of spiritual

\textsuperscript{112} Adnams, 186.
experience. It was hoped in this study that members of my musical groups were entering into church musical group membership with an openness to encounter God. Other motivations for participation might fail to show how music and koinonia connect the person to God and would tell a different story about church musical groups.

This study was also limited by the ability of the participants to articulate their faith, experiences and spirituality. Because people at Trinity United Church do not often speak openly about their faith life, participants might have difficulty finding the words to articulate how their experiences have influenced their connection to God. It was hoped that the exercise of journaling and the opportunity for a second interview would help participants to articulate and discuss the spiritual aspects of their experiences.

As a qualitative study, research of this size will only generate experiences from a few lives that have been influenced by their participation in church musical groups. This study also takes place in one congregation of one denomination. Other church contexts may have a different experience for choir and handbell choir members. These differences can be due to geographical, demographical, economic, philosophical, cultural and theological differences of the church community, to name a few. In addition, the ministerial staff and director of the ensembles (including the Minister of Music) could provide a different experience for the participants.

There were no known risks for an individual to participate in this study. It was possible that selection of the interview candidates could cause division in the group due to jealousy. To address this, I introduced the project during a choir rehearsal and explained that I cannot interview everyone, so a selection must be made. Moreover, the decision of
who to interview will be made to create a diverse sample of age, experience and gender and does not imply any judgment about the quality of the journal entries, per se.

It is possible that the process of journaling, discussion and reflection on spiritual matters of personal faith and relationships with others could raise issues of an emotional, even traumatic, nature. Participants were reassured that they could withdraw from the study at any time, choose not to participate in any portion of the study, or request pastoral support for any concerns which the study process might precipitate. The minister of the congregation, who was not involved in the research, was available for such pastoral care, counseling, or spiritual support, should it have been required.
4 Reporting on the research

4.1 Journal Entry findings

All members of the Chancel Choir (approx. thirty members) and the Jubilate Handbell Choir (approx. twelve members) were invited to participate in writing journals after rehearsals and worship services over a six week period. Eighteen people (fourteen choir members and four handbell ringers) submitted consent forms and journals entries, some only once, some for every service and rehearsal. In total, eighty journal entries were collected. The questions asked as journal prompts were meant to access current experiences and stories from the participants, not necessarily formative or experiences from their past experience. Because of the six-week time span, the results of the journals represent a snapshot in time. During this time, the Chancel Choir rehearsed weekly, once with a substitute director, sang an anthem each Sunday and participated in three church funerals. The handbell choir, Jubilate, rehearsed weekly and rang once in church. No outreach performances, workshops or other events fell during the journaling period.

The journal entries were read to discover key themes and discoveries about the experiences of the members of the choir and handbell choir.

4.1.1 Community

One of the most prominent themes in the rehearsal journals was that musical ensembles provide a community for the participant. This is perhaps because there is more interpersonal interaction in a rehearsal than in a worship service. Patience, care, support
and humour are needed in order to learn the music at hand. One participant writes, “I kept noticing how much we interact as a ‘church family’ – everyone different but each person accommodating that difference and, at many moments, enjoying the difference; people helping each other when needed; people waiting while others get things sorted out themselves or depending on other people to wait for the same reason.” This community contributes to the experience to each member of the ensemble, and has the potential to change their mood and encourages their participation. One choir member wrote, “During choir practice I always feel comfort and belonging and often joy. The comfort and belonging comes from the satisfaction of being with and working with people who share many of the same thoughts, beliefs and attitudes.” Belonging to the group extends to affect the participants spiritual life. In the handbell choir, one person observed, “camaraderie is spiritual.”

In worship, one person wrote that listening to another group make music caused them to feel a connection to the church community. “Pride was the emotion I felt – I am so darn proud of our Jubilate Junior, especially the ‘Joyful Joyful’. Each time they play or when I see them I think THEY BELONG TO US. These wonderful children growing into young adults.” Here, the music program gives a sense of camaraderie between musical groups as they support each other and allow each other to enter into music as a listener.

Of course, group work does not always have favourable results. On one occasion, the choir anthem did not go as planned in the service. One journal reflects the feelings of the choir member, “After the service, still calm but disappointed – we had worked so hard on the anthem- rehearsal was perfect. Sunday service – one voice out of sync. As a choir we will forget and forgive.” The writer admits their initial disappointment in the team effort,
but acknowledges that because of choir community, the group will be able to move on and maintain a good relationship with one another.

4.1.2 **Support**

As an extension of the musical group community, the members expressed great care in support for one another. During the journaling period, a new choir member joined the choir. Many choir members wrote about their feelings around how they might best welcome and integrate the new member. One person writes,

> Our anthem for Sunday is ‘We are singing for the Lord is our light’ a most appropriate observation. Interest perked as we had a new man at rehearsal, Harry, was welcomed. I couldn’t help thinking how difficult it would be for him, including the Zulu language. Not easy for me, even though we have sang it before. Nevertheless as we were leaving I saw Harry being fitted with a choir robe. How exciting and challenging it must be for him. It’s meant to be, the Lord will be his light and the singing will give him pleasure as it does for the rest of us.

In addition to the clear desire to support and integrate the new choir member, it is also worth noting how the music of the rehearsal interplays with the writer’s reaction. The text of the anthem being sung in rehearsal gave this person insight into this circumstance as they hope that he too is singing for the Lord is his light.

The Trinity United Chancel Choir provides musical leadership at all church funerals. The choir considers this an important part of their ministry in the church in supporting their church family and the wider community. During the journaling period, we had 3 church funerals and I invited them to use the Worship Reflections journal questions to reflect upon their experiences. One singer reflects on two funerals that happened in one week.

> “The choir was much needed at the small Hubbs funeral. The hymns and words were
important to the family and the deceased but no strong singers” “The Guernsey funeral truly appreciated the choir, not only for its anthem and musical leadership but because they presented caring and comfort.” Numerous journal entries reflect similar sentiments and it is clear that the choir sees their role at a funeral to be one of support for the family. Another person says, “I believe we did our best for the family.” One choir member commented that in “talking to a church member after the service, she remarked about the comfort at a funeral seeing the choir arrive (not the clergy) the choir!” This shows that the choir does not just feel like they are supporting the family, but that the congregation feels comfort in the choir’s support.

In another journal, the singing of a hymn brought back a memory of a time where they felt supported by the church community when she was grieving. “During ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’ I was taken back to my Mom’s service in the funeral home in Port Perry. This was one of my Mom’s favourites. I stood beside my Uncle and he held my hand as we sang with the congregation – yet just us. A wonderful feeling of support.”

4.1.3 Transformation

Another pattern that emerged through the journal entries was that of transformation. It seems that for many people, rehearsals and worship services improve their mood, energy and sense of peace. “If I am feeling low when I come to choir rehearsal, always when it’s ended I go home feeling better than when I came. Music powers my very soul.” Another musician says that before one of the funerals that we sang at, which was the funeral of a close friend he was “apprehensive,” but after the service he felt “hopeful and thankful.” On another occasion, a bell ringer told about how being inspired in rehearsal makes her
feel more connected to God in her life outside of bell choir. “I always feel better after a
bell rehearsal and often I am thinking about Debbie’s patience, enthusiasm and the degree
of thinking/work she has put into the preparation. That was what I was thinking after this
rehearsal and these thoughts were inspiring for me personally. The rehearsal experience
and the thoughts that follow make me feel more connected with God and with a purpose
for living.” These examples of how participating in music rehearsals and worship
services transform the participant’s lives give important insight into how the music
program nurtures a person’s spiritual life and the validity of music ministry.

It is not just the music of a rehearsal or worship service that causes the transformation.
Rehearsals and services are multidimensional. Participants spoke of sermons, prayers,
and interpersonal exchanges as having significance in their lives. In regards to a
devotional reading presented at the beginning of one choir rehearsal, Susan says, “This
devotion has really stayed with me. Yes, it came home with me and even this morning I
was searching out photos of our past choir members. That’s where my thoughts went last
night to our ‘Singing Saints’.” The devotional changed her perspective during the
rehearsal and even influenced her actions the following day as she searched out old
photographs.

Sometimes the choir experience can change a person’s mood or thoughts in a negative
way when things don’t go well. This person felt their initial optimistic outlook change
after the anthem did not go according to their expectations. “Initially I felt optimism
connecting with importance of ‘love’ discussed in a number of ways during the service. .
. This optimism was temporarily dampened after our anthem as I felt we did not perform
too well.”
4.1.4 Experiencing God

It seems from the journal entries, that although participants have experiences in rehearsal that carry over into their week, they feel most connected to God during a worship service. The act of singing the anthem allowed choir members to feel God’s presence. They write, “I loved today’s anthem. I really felt as we were singing it that God was telling us that we were doing the right thing in the right place.” And, “Going into that service, I was experiencing some tension. The whole was resolved with the singing of the anthem. I sang out more than usually and, at one point, there was a Power felt, reflected in my singing.” In these examples, the singers both felt God’s presence and were able to use that experience to gain insight and change how they made music.

One particular choir member wrote a journal entry where he outlined that singing in the choir gives him a sense of ordained purpose.

As a child I stuttered very badly, words would not come out of my mouth. When you are a child other children are cruel, and make fun of you, no matter what the inflection is, mine was speech. One day you find out you can do something, maybe just a little better than the rest of the kids. My thing was singing. Music since that time has always been my uplifting force, like the song, On Eagles Wings. I relate to this piece. I believe God gave me a voice to use to praise him and also benefit others and I intend to use it as long as I can.

Sometimes, the effort required to make music (reading notes, rhythms and words, tuning, blend etc.) is distracting for the musician and prevents them from being able to experience God in rehearsal or in worship. One person writes, “I find I am very focused on getting it right, and forget about God.” Making music can be distracting from the very thing it is trying to accomplish. Although singing and ringing can provide a means to experience God’s presence, it can also inhibit a person’s worship experience.
4.1.5  Absorbed in music

When musicians allow themselves to enter fully into the making music, they can open themselves up to express their emotions and as a result can feel much better afterwards. “Before rehearsal I felt completely exhausted and had a bad headache. I just wanted to curl up in a ball somewhere dark. During the rehearsal I was able to let go and although I was not completely alert, I could keep up with the music and lose myself in the flow of it at times – especially while drumming on the cajon. Afterwards, I fell more peaceful – less worried about what I’m supposed to do or say and my headache is better.”

Many participants reflected on the music made in worship while they were listeners and not the music makers. Participating in music through listening allowed them to become engaged, not by doing but by allowing themselves to be drawn into a meditative space. One choir member remembered how they felt while the bells were playing. “Listening to the bells during the opening scripture helped to form visions of the readings in my mind.” Another person reflected on an organ postlude after communion. “When you played the postlude, variations on ‘One Bread, One Body’, I felt a strong sense of peace and well-being. I often feel connected to certain passages of music, almost as if I am drawn inside the sound.”

While choir music has lyrics that communicate a specific message, handbell music is often open to more interpretation as to its meaning as the composer gives little more than a title. Here, the music speaks for itself based on tonality, harmony, tempo, dynamics, bell techniques and the context in which the piece is used. Sometimes, a handbell piece is
based on a hymn that has a lyric that the ringers can reference or the topic of the piece can be written into the music. During the journaling period, the handbell choir was working on a piece called “Into the Wilderness” by Jason Krug.\textsuperscript{113} This piece was divided into three sections, each representing a time that Jesus was tempted by the devil. At the beginning of each section, there was a heading in the music that read “The first temptation” or “The second temptation.” As part of the rehearsal, the scripture associated with the piece was read and discussed. A bell ringer reflected on the importance of spending rehearsal time to relate the music to Scripture and how that allowed them to become more absorbed into the music.

> When we started playing the music for each temptation, it really helped to have reviewed what the temptations were. I could understand the music more quickly and, because I was listening to it from a scriptural based perspective, I listened more carefully to the meaning of the music. I had a more heightened experience from the meaning of the scripture. This created a closer connection for me with the experience of Jesus. I was no longer just a spectator reading the mechanics of the music. It was more of a spiritual experience.

This deeper understanding of the music gave them focus and increased their ability to connect with the piece and with God.

4.1.6 Music and Message

It is important to choir and handbell choir members for the music that they offer to fit into the theme of the worship service and to offer a message to the congregation. This is significant for both the musician’s experience and the way that they perceive their music being interpreted by the congregation. One choir member expresses, “Often during

\textsuperscript{113} Jason Krug, \textit{Into the Wilderness: The Temptation of Jesus} (Columbus, OH: Beckenhorst Press, 2013).
rehearsal, our director makes reference to the theme of the service for Sunday. I love this because it opens my mind up to seeing and feeling how the music fits with the service or how our music might exemplify the theme.” Another choir member reflects on how both the text and the tune make her feel connected. “I felt connected during the hymns – the words were so appropriate for the ‘love’ theme and the tunes were upbeat.”

Sometimes the anthem leads to reflection on the singer’s life outside of church. “The anthem for Dave Upton’s funeral, You’ve Always Been Faithful, really reflects how I’m feeling in my own spiritual life. It does feel to me as if the difficult times in my life have been for a reason and that if I keep trusting and persevering that I will continue to see the fruits of God’s influence in my life.”

4.1.7 Influences of Daily Life

Perhaps the most common theme throughout the journals was the influence of the individuals’ daily life (work, family, chores) on their experiences in rehearsal and worship. As one participant wrote, “I sometimes feel like I’m not as engaged or trying as hard as I should be, because of external factors.” Another choir member gave this example, “I was very tired before rehearsal today. Andrew had an oral operation yesterday and was uncomfortable all day and unable to eat anything but liquids. I was trying to get caught up with my housework all day, but worried about Andrew’s condition at the same time.” Sometimes the participant could not pinpoint the problem, only that external circumstances were affecting the rehearsal and something did not seem right. “The music was great – rehearsal was fine. However, everything seemed to be ‘flat’. Perhaps because we were missing a number of members. Perhaps because I was
thinking about the funeral on Saturday.” The influences of a person’s day on their focus, emotional state, mood etc. should not be underestimated and these external influences affect their spiritual experiences as well.

4.2 Participants Narratives

Four participants were chosen to participate in 2 interviews each, of approximately an hour each in length. They were chosen to represent the diversity in the journal participant pool. Two people were chosen from each of the choir and handbell choir of various ages, genders, and experience levels both in the ensemble and in the church.

In order to provide a contextual lens for the findings from the interviews, I have compiled a narrative for each participant, outlining some relevant biographical information and theological touchstones.

4.2.1 Patricia

Patricia is an only child, born in Winnipeg, Manitoba to non-church attending parents. Her Grandmother who was involved in the United Church introduced her to church. Her parents did not encourage Patricia’s involvement in the church, rather, they reprimanded her for her beliefs and involvement, calling Christians hypocritical and selfish. Her childhood home was wrought with conflict between her parents and her father was an alcoholic. Despite her parent’s discouragement, Patricia found a home in the church. She says, “I found in the church a sort of haven because I found there were people that were
kind to each other and seemed to be willing to do positive things, not for their own gain but just because they thought it was part of their faith.”

Patricia and her family moved to Baltimore, Ontario in 1957 and she became part of the junior choir at that time. Patricia’s grandmother remained a very important part of her life, living with her family for about half of the year, spending the rest of her time in Manitoba or later, British Columbia with her other son. Patricia saw her Grandmother as a protecting force against her harsh mother. Music was yet another area of conflict in the home. Her father only liked 1940s American ballads while her mother and Grandmother liked opera. Patricia fondly remembers walking home from school at lunchtime to listen to the CBC with Grandmother each day. Her American-born father objected because it was Canadian and believed that nothing Canadian could be good.

One of the positive memories that Patricia has of her father is of him singing with her from a very young age. He would have her sing the melody low so that he could harmonize above her. This meant that by the time she was in school, she had developed a strong low voice and a strong ear and consequently she was called upon to be an alto. Singing has always been a huge part of Patricia’s life, singing in the church choir, school choir, and community musicals.

Patricia married her husband, who was also very active in the United Church and enjoyed singing. Together they had 3 children. They began their lives together in Scarborough, moving to Cobourg in 1975. Upon making their permanent home back in Cobourg, both Patricia and her husband both became members of Trinity United’s Chancel Choir. Their church choir membership has been almost continuous. She says, “Well I know we tried
not singing in the choir at one point and it didn’t work. I felt really strange not being in
the choir and I felt uncomfortable. Didn’t like being in the congregation at all. No, that’s
not where I belong. I belong up in the choir loft. There’s a feeling of community and
warmth and that’s where I need to be.” Patricia raised her children and made a successful
career as a writer. Music continues to be a constant and important part of her life.
Currently, she sings in both the Trinity United Chancel choir and a local community
choir. She begins each day by listening to WXXI. “I come down, make coffee and I sit
and I don’t want to talk to anybody, I just want to listen to music.” “It sort of sets me up,
it centers me.”

**Touchstones:**

Patricia defines God as an energy of love. She relates to the book “Dying to be Me” by
Anita Moorjani where the author retells her near death experience and discovery of a
powerful energy of love. Patricia identifies this energy as God. She also states that her
favourite scripture is 1 Corinthians 13, which speaks of the importance and nature of
love. Because she felt like her Grandmother loved her, and because of her
Grandmother’s connection to the church, her Grandmother is close by in her image of
God and the moments where she feels like God is close by her. Some of her most
spiritual experiences where she felt like God was most present, she also felt the presence
of her Grandmother, or smelled her perfume or saw her standing in the church balcony
during a choir rehearsal.

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114 Anita Moorjani, *Dying to Be Me: My journey from cancer, to near death, to true healing*  
In response to her faith in a loving God, and in empathy for others, Patricia has a strong sense of social justice. She had a copy of “Make me a channel”\textsuperscript{115} on her office wall for years as a prayer and reminder of her call. The hymn “Dreaming Mary”\textsuperscript{116} speaks to her because in God there is transforming power.

4.2.2 John

John was born to an agricultural family in a small town near London Ontario. His mother took him to the local United church regularly while his father stayed home and worked on the farm. The small rural church didn’t have a Junior choir program, however, they would ask the piano students, including John, to play at meetings of the United Church Women on occasion. There was a very active music program in John’s school despite it being a one-room schoolhouse. In high school John started singing with a barbershop quartet and barbershop chorus at the school. He also had a rock and roll band with some friends. John went to university and would return on weekends to help on the farm and attend church. This church offered and represented a stable environment for John. He speaks fondly of his parent’s marriage of over 50 years, the commitment and hard work of members of the small rural church and in maintaining that community. Older hymns that they used to sing in that church bring back fond memories for John.


After getting married to a woman who was a member of the Salvation Army church, they began attending the Salvation Army church together. This church had a brass band and a choir called the Choristers of which he joined both. He also accompanied one of the Captains with his guitar to minister in prisons. They then moved to Ottawa for John’s work and joined the Woodruff temple there. There, John joined a group called Temple Brass, a group of brass, guitars and a quartet of singers that would visit churches and perform services in public venues like the local park or a grocery store parking lot, introducing contemporary and popular music into a church setting. In presenting this music in a new setting, it illuminated the text in a different way for the listener. In bringing the outside world into the church, it changed the listener’s perception of the piece, giving it new meaning so that when they heard the piece outside of the church context, they heard it with new understanding.

John moved to the Cobourg area in 1975 and had a less regular relationship with the Baltimore United Church for approximately 20 years and then Trinity United in Cobourg for the past 20 years. He has been the owner of his own land use consulting firm for over 20 years. John is an active member of the local theatre community, mostly helping with the production side of shows. He found that he missed singing on a regular basis so John joined the Trinity United Chancel choir in 2010. Since then, his church attendance became much more regular. He has become a more involved member of the congregation, joining committees and getting more involved in church projects. John’s second marriage has recently ended and he identifies the choir as an important support system at this time “I’m going through a separation and it’s been very good to have the choir to be a solid place that I can come to and be part of a group.”
John describes himself as a “solitary individual.” He finds that being involved in the church choir forces him to be a part of a group and express feelings he might not otherwise express. He says,

Doing it as a group that helps us understand that we’re not in this by ourselves, we’re preparing and presenting music as a group and so we have to figure out how to do that together so that to me comes close to expressing that we’re not individually responsible for that music. We’re collectively responsible for that music and I think that’s what God intends is that somehow we are to do this together, not to be individuals seeing our own salvation, we’re supposed to do this as a group.

**Touchstones:**

John says that he has always been partial to the 23rd Psalm and John 1. The 23rd Psalm because of its agrarian setting and the music that he thinks of when ever he thinks of it. He loves John 1 because his public school class memorized it and recited it at a community gathering.

4.2.3  **Karen**

Karen was raised in the United Church. She took piano lessons and eventually was a piano major and later a voice major at university. Karen became a music teacher and composer of all types of music. She describes her compositions as being 50/50 choral and instrumental and 50/50 sacred and secular. Karen did not start singing until University, when she was hired by a church as a section lead. Most of her career she did not sing as a volunteer in a church or community choir because she was either directing or travelling for work. During her career, however, she always stayed as an active member of a congregation. For 4 or 5 years she sang in her husband’s choir in a church near Toronto.
Her career as a professional musician led her to be involved in short term projects in churches of other denominations. Karen lives her life with a musical soundtrack. She says there is always music in her head like in John Steinbeck’s novel “The Pearl” where the people experience songs in their heads to accompany their day.

Karen moved to Bracebridge in 2007 and started attending the United Church there and joined the choir, however, due to events in her life, including the death of her mother, she stopped attending church regularly for the first time in her life. Despite friendly people and what she describes as good ministers and nice music, she “found the services really depressing and I couldn’t afford to go in there in good spirits and come out depressed every week.” She believes that it was because “Even though the services were really buoyant and up all the time, there was almost zero kind of theological content and also something you can hang your hat on and take home with you and think about during the week.” As such, she only attended church in recent years on the occasion that she was needed to help out with the handbell choir.

Last summer Karen retired and moved to Cobourg. She describes her experience at Trinity United as “coming home” and now is a regular church attender again. Karen immediately became a member of the handbell choir. This is Karen’s first year as a regular ringer in the handbell choir, having had only experience as a substitute ringer in her previous congregation for the past three years.

**Touchstones:**

Karen says that she is most interested in the Holy Spirit and God, less in Jesus. She says that Jesus is interesting too, but that “the concepts to do with the Spirit are the ones that
lift me up and get me going. The ones about God are more about me figuring out what I should be doing.” In line with this, she identifies the hymn “Spirit of Gentleness” as one of her favourites. “When I sing that hymn I am immediately caught up in thinking about doing things and participating and being wholly involved spiritually.” Karen identifies the beginning of Psalm 42 as a text that describes how she feels about God: “As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.” She also finds Psalm 95:1-7 very uplifting. These texts speak of a desire and a longing to worship God and to do God’s will.

4.2.4 Rhonda

Rhonda was baptized at St Hilary’s Anglican Church in Port Credit and started attending First United Church when she was eight or nine. This was a large and active congregation full of young families. She had piano lessons up to Grade 5 Royal Conservatory of Music and attended an arts high school where she played flute and percussion. She sang in the Junior choir at church and eventually the senior choir for a while. The church would sometimes invite her to play her flute in church. A very active youth group largely influenced Rhonda in her church. She always felt that the church was an extension of family.

When Rhonda attended university she found a United Church wherever she was living. She moved to Cobourg and joined Trinity United in 2000. Since high school, she has not been actively making music (singing, playing flute or percussion) except for as a congregation member at Trinity United or at chapel services at her work until she joined the handbell choir upon its inception in 2010. Rhonda currently works as a librarian at a
private school associated with the Anglican church. She is married with a teenage son. She feels that it is important to have the church family available to her son so that he has other adults in his life to talk to and watch out for him. Her father still attends First United in Port Credit, but Rhonda does not wish to visit the church as she has heard about modifications to the building that the church has had to make due to financial constraints and declining membership.

**Touchstones:**

Rhonda has not “fine-tuned what her spiritual life is” but says that her spiritual life is pretty tied into her church family. She says that she “is not as in touch with the worship piece, the spiritual piece, as perhaps I could be.” She identifies Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (to everything there is a season) as a key scripture that resonates with her. “I've always found it 'centering', and it gained even more resonance since we read it at my mothers funeral.”

She loves the old hymns, especially with loud organ, such as “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah”\(^\text{117}\) and “This Is My Father’s World.”\(^\text{118}\) She loves them because they connect her to her own personal past and the history of the church. Because of this connection to memory, she does not like it when the words of the hymn have been updated to accommodate inclusive language or a non-gendered God.

\(^{117}\) John Hughes, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” words: Peter Williams and William Williams, (no. 651) in *Voices United.*

Rhonda says that music has not affected her relationship with God. She never felt like there was anything missing in her relationship with God before she started doing music and doesn’t feel like anything has changed in terms of God in her life. However, she does feel she has a greater understanding of service planning since becoming a member of the handbell choir.

4.3 Findings from participant interviews

Each participant had two interviews, one week apart that lasted for approximately an hour in length. The first interview was based on a set of questions found in Appendix E. The second interview provided an opportunity for clarification and expansion based on the first interview. Each interview was transcribed in full and then coded for themes. A list of themes can be found in Appendix F. In this section I will explore some key themes from each participant’s interviews in conversation with the participant’s narrative.

4.3.1 Patricia

**Theme 1.7: Safe Place**

For Patricia, church choir participation was historically important to her because the choir gave her a safe place to go twice a week, away from the conflict in her home. This feeling of the choir being a haven continued well past her childhood and continues to be a very important part of her life. “I think because for me the church was always a safe haven for so long to get away, so twice a week, on Thursday and on Sunday I could get away from the mayhem and come into this completely different atmosphere, and so that carries on
even thou I created a very different family and we have lived a very different life. It’s still, I always feel, I do, I feel safer when I come in, I still do.”

Theme 1.2 Church Family

Creating this feeling of safety, is the people of the choir, who have become a family to her. In this family she finds support and encouragement. “I like being part of the group. I feel it’s a very positive experience, coming in and talking to everyone. I feel that I belong there. I feel that people are very unjudgemental.”

Theme 1.1 Support

Patricia feels that she can tell members of the choir things that she cannot tell other people because of the safety and trust that she feels in the choir. “I feel like I can say things. I really do.”

Theme 2.2 Harmony

Patricia indicates that it is not only the social aspect of the group that makes her feel supported, but that making music with other people makes her feel connected to them. “I really enjoy hearing the other parts, but again, I guess that goes back to when I was a very young child and learned to sing by somebody singing above me. So it doesn’t matter if it’s above or below, but I really like that feeling. I always feel locked in more when I can hear another part.” For Patricia, singing with her father was a positive memory of a difficult relationship. She remembered feeling connected to him when she sang and this
developed her love for singing. She then carries this memory over into her current musical activity, feeling connected to the other singers in the group.

*Theme 1.6 Community Leads to God*

Although Patricia has sung with community choirs and theatre organizations, she identifies that the church choir provides a different type of community experience that is sacred and leads to God. “It’s a community you come into where you have a common interest in faith and in pursuing faith. I mean, with Oriana [the community choir], there’s a very strong sense of community but it’s a different sense of community, it’s much more secular.” She links that feeling safe in the church choir is a big part of her feeling comfortable to connect to others and to God in this way. Patricia says that both the music and the people allow her have a spiritual experience. “I do feel at times, not always, but I do feel a strengthening and a channeling into a spiritual part of myself.” Being in a safe place with people who are supportive and helping others strengthens her faith and having those people appreciate the music she is making in the choir reinforces her faith.

*Theme 3.2 Absorbed in music*

Patricia experiences a spiritual connection both when she listens to music and makes music. She uses listening to music to escape and focus both at home and at church. Listening to the radio in the morning focuses her for her day. At church, Patricia finds herself being carried into the music made by other people. “It was interesting, when the kids sang, that really, that was the last one, that introit, Beloved, and especially the beginning of it, it was like I felt this drawing of myself up, in out or whatever.” Patricia
sings. “It removes you from whatever you’re dealing with and you just absorb yourself in the music and that’s really a positive thing. And certainly when it’s religious music then you’re spinning into thinking about faith or thinking about your own situation or whatever.”

**Theme 3.1 Meditation**

She compares being absorbed as a singer to a meditative habit. “Music! Music washes everything else out of the way.” The music and the lyric being sacred are key to entering into a sacred space. As a child, the choir helped her express her emotions that were not accepted at home. “I move into a zone when I get really wrapped up and I do at times when you’re playing the postlude, I wish everybody would be quiet! If I could learn how to meditate properly maybe I could get away from all that background noise and concentrate more on the music, which is nice when you’re singing the anthem or practicing the anthem because there isn’t all that other distraction.” For Patricia, one advantage to participating and not just listening to music is an increased ability to focus and concentrate due to a higher level of engagement and that there are not other things happening in the room when the choir is singing.

**Theme 3.7 Music and Memory**

Patricia spoke about multiple occasions where her music had connected her to her Grandmother’s presence after her Grandmother’s death. She told a story about being discouraged in her work as an author and had the music playing in the background. “It was a piece of music either a hymn or something religious, and all of a sudden I could
smell her perfume just everywhere. In this room! Where she had never been! So I’m sure she was there.” In this instance, the music helped her connect with her grandmother. Another time, she recalls in a journal entry, that she saw her deceased Grandmother in the church during a choir rehearsal. On the Sunday she was journaling about, the minister had preached about finding God in Thin Places. “My ‘thin places’ experience took place in the late 1970s during a Thursday evening Trinity choir practice. We were in the choir loft, standing up and practicing a hymn I can’t remember, when most clearly, I saw my grandmother standing as though singing with the congregation, this same hymn. I was so taken aback, I stopped singing. I told no one for a very long time but her presence gave me enormous comfort.”

When asked where God is in these encounters, Patricia said, “because I felt she really loved me. I felt that she was the only person that really loved me when I was growing up so when she was gone I was pretty bereft.” Patricia’s belief that God is an energy of love, allows her to find God in the memory of her Grandmother, and because of her Grandmother’s involvement with Patricia and music, music is often the catalyst for these experiences.

*Theme 2.4 Quality*

Despite the importance of the past in her life, Patricia indicates that she is more interested in how the music she sings applies to her present life than in nostalgia. She says she likes the modern hymns because “the theology of the lyrics has more significance to me at this stage in my life than the old theology” Patricia’s career as a writer influences the importance that she places on the text of a song. She finds poorly written lyrics
distracting and says that when she finds a poorly written text she spends most of the time trying to fix it while she is singing. She says that the factor that makes it easiest for her to connect with God is “the quality of the music. That would probably be the main thing. We have done some very simple pieces that for me have strong emotional connection to them.” Whether complex or simple, it is important for Patricia that the music and lyric are both well constructed and well executed. The effort and technique of the ensemble are important because poorly sung music distracts her from being able to enter into a worshipful space.

*Theme 4.3: Leadership*

Patricia feels that it is the job of the Chancel choir to inspire the congregation. It is the nature of the music, and the faith of the choir members that allow this to happen. “I think our music has a religious, you know, we inspire people faith wise, sometimes more than others, you’re dealing with all these different people. . . overall, I would think it’s to inspire a feeling of faith in the congregation and that it makes them feel connected to the church and to their faith through music.”

*Theme 4.1 Outreach*

Patricia takes great pride in the music program at Trinity United Church and feels that it is an important part of what the church has to offer.

The whole music program is a beacon that we shine, I think it is one of things Trinity really shines to the world. I mean, we have that lunch program and everything, I worked on one of those, whatever the one was before, I did it for about ten years, having food for people come in for lunch, that’s part of it as well,
but certainly the choir, I think we lead and demonstrate a certain aspect of spirituality that’s important because of the importance of music.

She does not feel comfortable talking with others outside of the church about her faith, however she sees church choir performances outside of the church service to be a way for her to express her faith publically. “I don’t talk a lot about my faith to people, I don’t. I guess I feel that, if anybody asks me, yes, I do go to Trinity United Church and I sing in the choir and I have for decades. I feel very strongly that example is the best teacher and so I think partly by going out there, and yes, I’m part of Trinity United Church and whoever sees me fine, good, they can come to whatever conclusion they want.”

4.3.2 John

Theme 3.7 Music and Memory

John connects his love for the church, music and community to fond memories of his home rural United Church congregation growing up. His touchstone of Psalm 23 because of its agrarian setting shows a comfort in connecting with his past. His time in the Salvation Army with the contemporary Temple brass band also brings back key memories. Music brings back these memories and certain pieces resonate with him for this reason.

The traditional church choir music, takes me back to when I was singing in a choir in a small country church that I grew up in, I can remember the older gentlemen that I was singing beside in those choirs and think fondly of that situation. Some of the music takes me back to that circumstance. And yet, when we get into some of the contemporary music, that takes me to the Ottawa situation that I was involved in, so it can take me there as well.
**Theme 1.1 Support**

John feels that it is the role of the church, and in particular, the church choir to provide support to its members and the greater community. In the choir, he feels a personal responsibility to assist the other singers including one who has the early stages of dementia and another brand new member.

Well, I’m there to provide help to other choir members, we talked about our particular bass section, some of us in the bass section need more help than others. Whether we have a new member joining the section where I’m just trying to make them feel comfortable and at home and they feel like they are making a contribution to our section and to our choir and there are other members of our section that we, from time to time have to help and we need help ourselves.

John also identifies that the choir has helped support him while going through his separation.

The choir at Trinity United leads all worship services, including funerals. When a funeral is being held at the church, an email goes out to the choir members letting them know the details of time and date and what will be sung. John feels that singing for funerals is a ministry of the choir.

Again, it’s support, we have an opportunity to offer support to the family and the individuals in the family and through our participation in the service but also just by being there. The church provides a service to honour the individual, but most importantly to provide support to the family. And that service is a demonstration that we are there and we provide some understanding and some moral support. I keep using that term, but it’s real. That they’re not alone.
Theme 4.1: Outreach

Outside of the church, John continues his emphasis on support as a form of ministry. He spoke of when the choir went to the hospital and sang Christmas carols. John felt that the choir provided comfort to the patients and support to the nursing staff.

Reflecting on the outreach of the choir, John says,

Well, it provides a purpose to what we do and that’s always reinforces the fact that we’re not just there to create pretty music, there’s a message to this and there’s something that people appreciate and you can provide them with some support and assurance that there are people there who are interested and concerned with what’s going on in their community or wherever you’re participating in. And to be very candid, it’s really nice to get their appreciation for what we do. That’s the reciprocal support that’s important as well.

John’s emphasis on outreach stems back to his time singing with Temple Brass. That group’s mission of touring and playing music for different churches and in public venues provided a foundational value that lives can be changed by sharing sacred music.

He believes that the mission of the church should be to show society that people working together can do more than working as individuals. John thinks that God wants for us to work together in community for the greater benefit of one another.

The mission as I see it is a mission of providing a balance and showing that we really should be able to work together. I find that particularly in business there seems to be an emphasis on getting ahead and not always a strong commitment to collaboration and cooperation and I find that the church in our community is finding ways to demonstrate that by cooperating we can do more, we can achieve more. The church by sponsoring refugees and being involved in social programs and those kind of things, providing support to individuals in our community demonstrates that we have, there’s more to life than just the economic advantage that we can get through our work. And so that’s the way I see the church’s responsibility.
The church choir fulfills this mission each week in rehearsal for its members, each week in worship for the congregation and whenever the choir ventures outside the church walls to sing for those that hear them.

*Theme 1.3: Variety of People*

It is important to John that the all people are accepted into the group and acknowledged for what they have to offer. Through learning together, each person contributes in a different way and helps the group progress. “The whole rehearsal process is a chance to try new things and be willing to learn and it’s that whole learning experience through the rehearsal process that I find really interesting and very useful because everyone in our section and in our choir has something to offer there.” Because of the church’s purpose to be a spiritual and inclusive community, John believes that people are more tolerant of each other. “I find that the church choir is more supported and there is more of a sense of purpose that draws people together where they’re prepared to overlook some of those personality issues where you might otherwise say ‘no, I don’t need this’.”

*Theme 4.3 Leadership and Theme 4.2 music and message*

The church choir, according to John, provides leadership in the worship service by providing an example to the congregation physically and musically and through communicating their faith. John explains that the congregation looks to the choir for when to stand or sit, to lead unfamiliar hymns and has started copying the choir members who stay and listen to the postlude.
I think having a choir and being part of the choir, that is participating in the service provides a connection with the congregation, provides leadership to the congregation in the musical part of the service and also provides another expression of themes or the message for the service itself that the service is trying, when the music is bang on it really does help to emphasize, to provide alternate expression of the themes that the service is intending to explore.

John says that it is important that worship is not just lead by one individual, like a minister, but that there are real benefits for worship to be lead by a variety of people. This “gives people the opportunity to make that connection because it’s not a lecture, it’s a sharing of the experience both in what we’re singing, but that there are other people there that are visible that are participating in the service. And that gives us an opportunity to provide leadership.”

**Theme 1.5 Responsibility**

As leaders in worship, John emphasizes the importance of being present, active and engaged in the service through participation. He feels that this is of great benefit to his own engagement with the service and experience of worship.

Being part of worship introduces a responsibility to be present and to see connections, understand how the choir and what we’re doing singing the anthem and in singing hymns helps to present the message of the worship service. So those are things that are different from just attending and being a member of the congregation where as a member of the congregation, yes, you’re participating, but it’s different somehow. You’re kind of consuming, where if you’re a member of the choir, you have responsibility to be present, to be there, to help move whatever you can do in the service.

**Theme 3.6: Intent**

John believes that a good choir is a group that can interpret that music and present it in such a way that it has life and resonates with those people who are listening to it. “They
have to demonstrate to the congregation a lot of those aspects of worship, that they are directed and paying attention, that they are experience some of those processes and they’re presenting a message in their music that would encourage the congregation to participate.”

*Theme 2.4 Quality*

John feels that it is important that the lyrics and the music match in style and sentiment. He gives the example of the Good Friday anthem, where, he felt, that the music reflected the text and this lead to enhanced meaning for both the singer and the congregation. “The idea is that you have the lyrics and the lyrics have a certain feel to them, they are presenting a certain idea and when the lyrics and the music actually let you express that idea, those are factors I think that help to connect with the worship and the spiritual aspect of the worship”

*Theme 3.4 Music and Emotion*

It is important for John to have the choir in his life to provide an outlet for expressing himself and his faith. Having a structured weekly group that he attends helps by forcing him to be with a group of people. “It gives me a chance to express through the music, emotion, as I’ve already indicated, I’m kind of a solitary individual so it gives me a chance to be a part, to give me a chance to do what I wouldn’t ordinarily or naturally do. And that’s ok. It gives me a chance to express those feelings that I might not otherwise express.” Also, the act of making music gives a means to express the emotions. This is significant for John as he finds that music gives depth to the message in the lyric that
could not be conveyed fully without the music. “It’s when the thought can be expressed, when you can take the lyrics and the music and express that, those thoughts, or when you’re listening to someone else who is singing those then the music provides a deeper meaning, it’s more than just words, it’s emotion and the music, using music to express that emotion is a very powerful thing, I find it to be powerful.”

*Theme 3.5 Transformation*

The music program contributes to John’s spiritual life because “it gives me a chance to talk to other people. The music itself, I end up taking that back with me. I find myself thinking about it and humming the tune and thinking about the words, that somehow just come back after we’ve rehearsed it and even after we’ve sung it in the anthem I’ll think about those words and that music when I’m driving or whatever I’m doing.” For him, whether in rehearsal or worship, making music as part of a group provides him with social support and theological reflection to carry throughout his week. John states that on many occasions circumstances arise in his life that cause him to reflect on the anthems or hymns we are singing and help him make business and life decisions.

Joining the church choir has also affected his connection to the rest of the congregation and the life of the church. “I find I’ve gotten more involved in church activities as a result of being in the choir. There’s a regular nature of it, so I’m here, and because I’m here I see opportunities and get a chance to chat with people. I’ve gotten more involved in things that are going on in the church and I think that’s good, I’m enjoying that.” This is significant because prior to his church choir involvement at Trinity United, John was not a regular worship attender.
4.3.3 Karen

**Theme 3.2: Absorbed in Music**

Karen identifies music and the handbell choir as an important part of her spiritual life. As a composer, Karen thinks that sacred music is fundamentally different to secular music. “But generally sacred music—there’s something that lifts you out of the worldly part of your existence and moves you into an existence that maybe is more spiritual or sacred to you.” Karen has experienced music moving her into a sacred space on numerous occasions. “I think I’m probably closer to God because of the music because I’ve had so many really wonderful opportunities to express how I feel about God and about everything to do with God.” As noted earlier, in February, the handbell choir played “Into the Wilderness” by Jason Krug, based on the temptations of Jesus. After an introduction, the piece is divided into three sections that flow into each other with just a fermata between them, each labeled with the name of the temptation represented. The music ends with a coda in a soft, major key, representing the angles in the text. For the worship service, we integrated the scripture reading into the bell choir anthem. The scripture was read in sections during each fermata. Playing the piece in this way allowed the scripture to come alive for Karen, “I was being tempted like Jesus. And the temptations, you can get tempted by power, or to do something that you might think is not real, like turn stones into bread or something, but it was the feeling was very strong that way.” As a result, the experience of being fully immersed in the music made Karen play differently.

I played better for sure. I played stronger, more exactly, I played it with more finesse in the sense that the subtleties, I was suddenly able to do more subtleties with that because I had the energy and it all kind of came together and it was an
automatic reaction to feeling the music and knowing, ok, this is what we need right here. It was not upsetting, it was more like I was living through it and dealing with it as I went through it. Something bad happens in your life, you deal with it and then afterwards you are collapsing or whatever. I felt really, really alive, that feeling was really strong. I felt like a depth of emotion that, well in my everyday life right now I don’t feel that much depth of emotion. But in that situation I felt a great depth of emotion.

Karen feels that it is easier to express how she is feeling through music than trying to find the words.

There are so many things to do with a spiritual experience and to do with worship that can’t be put to words and music does that. It evokes all these things that we’re already feeling in our lives, maybe, but haven’t been explored enough or developed enough and sometimes they’re deep within and then I would feel then that the music draws it out of us. So you get a chance to not only experience that, and maybe express it, but also to explore what’s happening with it and how you feel about it and then you can move forward and go on to the next thing.

*Theme 3.5: Transformation*

Karen recalls a time that she performed The Confession Stone by Robert Fleming. This song cycle recounts the story of the life of Christ as seen through the eyes of Mary, his mother. She says that performing this piece made a big difference in her life.

In the confession stone, the way that the music was written, every detail, because even though he didn’t know Mary’s real words or anything, but the details that were in it, made all those details in his life seem absolutely real to me, like I really felt like I was there and I could experience it and really understand more in depth who Jesus is and what is important about Jesus, and why he is used as a model and how I can connect with that and work with that.

She recalls the piece and how it affected her,

There’s one movement where the music is kind of restless, it’s moving around like this <shows with hands that music is agitated>, Mary knows that Jesus has gone out and she’s a little worried, I guess she figured out that something bad could happen. And she’s waiting and she keeps, the line keeps coming out ‘where are you’ like it’s past dinner time ‘where are you?’ By putting the situation in a different context, that’s what helped it become more real and the overall situation with Jesus and how other people would feel if they’d actually been there . . . so
then I feel more part of it. It made me feel closer to Jesus. I’m like ‘I’m with her, where are you? Where are you?’

Karen identifies that it was performing the piece that really allowed her to be transformed by it. “I heard it performed first of all. Someone else performing it and I was moved by it but it was more the performing of the piece because I performed it a number of times and you know how you get inside a piece when you perform it. So that would be the most important factor of creating that reaction in me.”

Theme 3.6: Intent

Karen feels that in order to get to the “truth” of a piece and communicate that to the congregation, the musician(s) need to feel and understand that truth. “To me the most moving thing as far as the worship experience goes in terms of the church choir here is when they do a sincere performance. Even though I’m a musician I don’t come to criticize and I come for some meaning from it and if they’re sincere when they’re singing then it really contributes to my worship experience, so it’s not the perfect performance, it’s getting the truth of music through in some way or another.”

Theme 2.3: Variety

The handbell choir rings in church approximately once every 6 weeks. Karen says that the handbell choir serves a unique purpose, unlike the Chancel choir or other ensembles due to its physical presence, visual presentation and aural uniqueness. “In the service itself, I think it contributes to the service in a number of different ways. One way is that the sound is unusual and it doesn’t happen that often. It doesn’t happen that often in the
service so people really listen.” She concludes that more attentive listening leads to greater engagement on behalf of the congregation and that this is a major benefit of the handbell choir.

Theme 2.5: Visual

Karen rings bells because it is fun for her, but she also knows that having handbells in church is fun for the congregation.

Bell choir is so different, the sound alone, even if you did the same kind of pieces all the time, the sound alone, and also the visual effect of it. So it’s a good focuser for people in the congregation. Although it looks difficult when you watch people playing, it looks like a plaything. And I think that’s a good contribution to the church in our society today. That everything is not all serious, no matter if the minister is friendly and up all the time still it’s a figurehead at the front and a figure of authority but when the bell choir comes (laughs) it’s like toys and playing!

Karen identifies that it is important for the congregation to see other members of the congregation participating in the worship service. The joy exuded by the ringers in their music making is contagious to the listener.

Theme 4.3: Leadership

One of the functions of a church musical group, according to Karen, is for them to be able to provide for the congregation a way of expressing what the gathered community is feeling on their behalf. Often this can be planned ahead of time, based on the lectionary readings for the day, theme of the sermon or rites in the service, however improvised music provides a tool to reflect the thoughts and prayers of the congregation and musician in the moment.
People that improvise, they constantly need to be changing what they’re doing, they are reacting to the other performer or the audience, in this case it would be the congregation. So that means that there is a moment that when certain things should happen, and it’s not necessarily in the written music. But if somebody’s improvising they have the ability to capture that moment and do what the congregation would do for themselves if they could. . . I did one at a funeral, a friend of mine died in a fire, so I went back to Port Perry and I think they asked me to do an improv at one place. . . it was speaking it’s own words almost because of the situation.

Providing spontaneous musical expression then through improvisation, is not just a form of personal expression, but also a form of leadership.

**Theme 3.3: Offering to God**

Even though she speaks often of the effect of the handbells on the congregation, Karen is careful to clarify her primary goal, “I’m glad to help out in the service. And it’s like an offering where you want to give your best stuff. Because I feel like it’s an offering to God more than the congregation. But I feel special on those days because I get to help with the offering to God.” Before Karen moved to Cobourg, she did not attend church unless she was needed to help fill in for the handbell choir. She has a deep desire to help others be able to create music and contribute to the church, and she feels that it is most important to be able to offer her skills and gifts to God.

**Theme 1.6: Community leads to God**

The desire to help other people connect to God is based in Karen’s belief that God wants to have us in good relationship with one another. Moreover, the handbell choir is a subset of the church community, one that both represents and leads by example in how to work together as a community of God. “I think more and more over the years, I think more
about the church as a corporate body and how we help out each other and where God is in all of that whole relationship kind of thing. The bell choir is like a micro situation of these things going on, it makes sense and it gives a purpose, it makes life seem like it’s the right thing.”

It changes the way that Karen feels about the world and improves her outlook when she experiences the positive community at a handbell rehearsal. “It raises my opinion of people in general. Because you can do something else in the town and you may think “What a day!”—you’ve just had five people be rude to you in a row, interrupt conversations all this kind of stuff, but that doesn’t happen in bell choir! She identifies that the act of making music together, and the complexity of ringing one instrument with 13 people fosters this attitude. “I think the music helps them to be like that. Because of this business of getting it to work. Music makes us all better. The mechanics of the music makes us better people.”

As a result of the people of the handbell choir supporting one another musically and personally, the church is strengthened. “I think any group that’s really active in the church, interactive, like this is an interactive group and that is doing something to do with religion, I think that bolsters the church as a whole. And it holds the church steady. There is a continuity from those groups.” “In other words we bolster each other within the group and the whole is much greater than the individual pieces.”
Theme 1.4 Bonding and God

Karen feels that the members of church musical groups have a stronger bond with each other than community ensembles. She has developed a theory about why this bond would be closer. She observes that a community ensemble will rehearse for months and then present a concert, performing maybe 3 times a year. Church groups present music in worship on a much more regular basis, rehearsing often only one piece at a time.

For church choir and for bell ringing one of the big differences is more performances closer together. Performances are often where you get the “aha” moments and all that kind of stuff and so you have more opportunities to do that. And the other thing with spirituality and everything all connected here is I think groups that perform more frequently bond a lot more quickly and bond more strongly. And that helps the whole spirituality thing and connection with God and everything for me and for a lot of people.

Here, she also identifies that bonding with the group helps her connect to God.

Theme 1.5 Responsibility

Karen says, “I think I act as an anchor in the bell choir.” This is certainly true, due to her musical expertise. However, she does not allow her knowledge to give her an excuse to miss rehearsals or shrug her responsibilities putting out bells, participating in fundraising etc.

I feel responsibility. I wouldn’t schedule something else on a Tuesday night. Because I feel responsibility that if you don’t have enough players or you don’t have the players that can pretty well play their parts… that’s awful. . . Confidence is contagious, so if you are standing beside somebody who is just steady, and confident, not showing off all the fancy stuff they can do, that kind of thing, but somebody who is just steady, then the person beside them starts to pick that up.

This attitude is also in line were her thoughts on being part of a church community.
Theme 4.1: Outreach

Being new to Cobourg and Trinity United, Karen did not know anyone before joining the handbell choir. This has given her first hand knowledge about how the handbell choir has helped her integrate into the church. “I’m really pleased at how well I’m getting to know people all ready because in lots of situations in life it takes a much longer time than with the bell choir.” Not only has the handbell choir allowed her to get to know people faster, it has integrated her faster and easier into the rest of church life. “If you join a church choir or bell ringers, people’s perception change about you within the church. For example, somebody joins this church, they join the church choir, immediately they’re in the ‘in’ group—according to the rest of the congregation—because you’re so visible.”

Karen feels that one of the most important aspects of the church is to give people a place to find God and their faith. The music program can be used as a link between the people in the church and those outside the church, reaching out and bringing people into the building to work together.

I think one of the missions of the church is to give people a reason for living so that, and not just subsistence living but good quality of living in every way. I think it’s pretty hard for people to have that unless they have a strong faith of some type. I’m not saying you have to go to church to do that but you have to get it from somewhere and it doesn’t work inheriting it from your parents or something. It’s something you have to be involved in yourself, and so I think that should be one of the missions of the church. That IS one of the missions of the church. Outreach to me also includes the concept of integration and cross-fertilization. It’s not just reaching out to do things in the community, it’s them coming here and involving them in together.
4.3.4 Rhonda

Theme 2.1 Challenge

Rhonda started ringing handbells when the church bought them and started a handbell choir. She was intrigued by the instrument and thought that it might provide her with a new focus in her life. “When the bells came I was up for a challenge. But I realize how much I missed sight-reading and what pleasure it brought. It uses a different part of my brain.” She admits that it is easier to join a group like this when it is a brand new group and no one had ever rung handbells before. Rhonda had an advantage over others in the group because she could already read music. She had not played music since high school and missed music making. “It was something about music, it was something about being completely different from everything else I’ve done. I wasn’t doing anything like that. It uses a different part of my brain. So it made me realize that there was this little part of me that was asleep that had been asleep for a while and I was like ‘wow, I haven’t done this in a long time, this is really cool.’”

Theme 1.1: Support

Apart from musical challenge, the handbell choir provides Rhonda with an experience to be part of a group within her church family. Ringing in the handbell choir and making music together provides close connections between the members even if there is not much time for socializing during a rehearsal. “I feel appreciated, as I appreciate everyone else in the group. And I know that if I ever needed anything I would be very comfortable, it’s kind of like that extended family thing, some I might be closer to than others, but there’s this connection, there is this shared thing and so that, it sounds really weird to say
we’re not friends but there’s a really strong connection there.” The importance of this aspect of the handbell choir is demonstrated in her volunteering to be the “Sunshine girl” for the group. This role involves the organization of cards and/or flowers for members of the group who are sick or grieving on behalf of the handbell choir.

However, Rhonda is clear that she is not looking for a social group or club. “I’ve also been part of another group, that I really liked and was social, but part of it, well part of why I like bells is because of the social aspect, but it’s directed. This sounds terrible, but we’re all super busy. I’d love to sit down and have coffee and chat with my bell friends every week, but there’s too much going on. But I like that I get to see them and check in, but that we’re still doing something focused.” The feeling of accomplishment and purpose is very important to Rhonda.

**Theme 1.3: Variety of people**

Handbell rehearsals are noisy. With an activity like bell ringing that involves so much teamwork, there are always lots of side discussions about page turns, bell sharing and helping the newer ringers. Trinity’s handbell choir rehearses in a boisterous, fun loving, energetic environment. Often, people will come and look into the rehearsal room to see what all the laughing is about. The group consists of ringers from a wide age range and many different personalities. Rhonda appreciates the eclectic nature of the group. “I love everybody’s sense of humour, I love that there is a sense of humour. And I find everyone so interesting, I love that everyone has different backgrounds and brings different perspectives and different experience with them.”
Furthermore, she feels that the variety of people not only adds to the dynamics of the group but that each individual is taking away different things from being a part of the ensemble. “That we’re all there for at least one same reason, to make music, there are probably different things that people are getting out of it. That we’re there to accomplish the same thing.” Rhonda is amazed that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. “What I like is that I do this tiny itty-bitty part and everyone does their thing and that it makes this beautiful thing that I could never make on my own.”

Theme 1.5: Responsibility

In order for the handbell choir to function, there are many jobs that must be done. The handbell choir is a true team. Musically, there are 13 people playing one instrument. Attendance is critical. There is also a large physical set up and take down each week, along with fundraising, organization of outreach performances and trips and organizing social events. Rhonda is keenly aware of the responsibility that comes with being a handbell ringer,

It’s kinda like spokes in a wheel, so it’s kind of like everyone’s important… it’s a privilege, so with great privilege comes great responsibility. So I feel like if I’m committed to a piece, I’m relied upon to be at practice and I need to do my part whenever I can to be helping to break down and put stuff away. I struggle with the… I did executive for a couple of years and now I do sunshine stuff when I can, it’s not an onerous task or anything, but I struggle with that extra part of it.

Because of her understanding of responsibility in the small team, she feels guilt that her schedule does not allow her to take on a larger role in the choir.
Theme 1.2 Church Family

Growing up in the church, Rhonda developed a sense of importance about being a part of a church family. Her involvement in the youth group at her church was formative in her teen years. She says,

There’s something about, my church family is very special to me, and I say that in the broadest 350 people sense, I always have felt, but that’s probably because I grew up in the church too, to me its just an extension of family. And for [my son], I’ve always wanted him to have other adults in his life so if he doesn’t want to talk to us or whatever is going on there are other people keeping an eye out and that you get all the eccentrics and all the people that drive you nuts and all that but we’re all part of the same thing.

Theme 4.3 Leadership

Unlike other participants, Rhonda does not see the handbell choir as contributing to the church, rather, she sees herself as the beneficiary of the program. “When I think about volunteering at the church, like I still usher and I still do coffee hour and stuff because I don’t feel like this is a contribution. I feel that I am benefiting from bells and that I get the opportunity to ‘perform’.” “I feel like I get everything from it, I get that people like it and stuff but I’m like ‘they’re so great to let us ring in church’.”

Not only does she not see it as a contribution to the church, she also does not see her music in church as a gift to God. “In terms what I’m doing here, I don’t feel what I’m doing is a gift to God, not bells in particular, I think that living a life and doing things that I find meaningful and fulfilling is a gift to God and if this is something that brings meaning for me and makes me fulfilled, then it falls under that umbrella.” For Rhonda, the pleasure that handbells bring her is the gift to God.


**Theme 1.7: Safe place**

Despite this belief, Rhonda feels secure ringing with the handbell choir in church. Her connection to her church family provides her with a sense of safety when ringing in worship. She describes how she feels on a Sunday ringing. “Not that people’s expectations are not there, but I feel it is a very safe environment. I feel like if I screwed up, like when Sally and I did the Lucy/Ethel thing at the talent show, I did not lie awake at night thinking I’m such an idiot, it’s a very safe space for me, so I don’t, it’s more like an excited anticipation than a nerves type thing.” Here Rhonda is referencing her first attempt at a handbell duet after only having rung handbells for a year. The duet, at the church talent show was not a smooth performance, and has been lovingly compared to Lucy and Ethel from the TV show “I love Lucy.”

**Theme 3.2 Absorbed in music**

Rhonda admits, “I’m not as in touch with the worship piece, the spiritual piece as perhaps I could be.” She does not feel that making music has affected her relationship with God because, “I feel like I’m practicing in the house of God but I always generally feel enveloped and surrounded and so it hasn’t changed it, because I didn’t feel like there was something missing.” However, she identifies that there are moments where, although she isn’t sure she is having a spiritual experience, she is certainly deeply and involved in making music.

The very, very best part is where, whatever you call it, but being in the zone. Because I stop, because originally there’s you and then there’s this, I don’t really pay too much attention to the congregation, they’re kind of a blob which is great
but I’m hyper conscious of every note and also looking ahead and going…. There’s like these special few times and it doesn’t happen very often, where I’m not doing that, and I don’t know if it’s because I know the piece very well, or there’s something, but then I’m there.

She identifies the feeling of being “in the zone” as shutting off the rest of her life and her brain thinking about the technical details of the music. She wonders if ringing in this way leaves her open to the possibility of letting God in. “It’s a taking me out of myself thing. Is there something about use me as a vessel? Is that a…? It’s that kind of thing. I’m not here, this is shut off, paused, whatever, and that it’s open to what’s possible.”

Theme – 3.1: Meditation

Although she has never tried it, Rhonda has always like the idea of doing yoga. She says that she considers ringing handbells to hold a similar function to what yoga would in her life. “I really find that this accesses a different part of my brain that doesn’t get used elsewhere. So, it isn’t really escaping, it’s almost like parking? I stop this part and go here. And oh, time to exercise this! Like it’s, I get the escape idea but I feel like I’m running from it and I’m not, I’m not running from it, it’s more like I’m pausing. It’s like a big, really important pause.” She thinks that it is good to do this “because I feel like it uses a part of me, there’s something in my brain, something in reading music, I don’t know what it is about reading music. That makes me think differently or creative. It’s like all these different tiny puzzles.” For Rhonda, meditation is not necessarily a spiritual exercise but a focused exercise to allow her brain to focus on something different to its usual thoughts.
However, by the second interview, she had rethought why a meditative act was important to her. She likens it to breathing exercises that she teaches her students to help them focus, or her fondness for repetition in hymn singing.

So there’s something in that and it got me thinking about the hymn singing with the repetition and stuff like that and I think it’s something about quieting the mind, I think it’s about whether it’s prayer, it’s breathing, which I’ve been trying to do with my kids, in my advising meeting that we just do some breathing together. And I think it’s about quieting our minds and I can’t figure out whether it’s to let whatever we have in here out or whether it’s to let God in. Or it could be both.

This shows a shift in her thinking. First, Rhonda had expressed handbells as an activity that used her brain exclusively in a different way. Here she begins to wonder whether the different activity simply blocks out other thoughts or opens her up to something spiritual.

In Rhonda’s journal and interview, she indicated the importance of having a devotional at the beginning of the rehearsal. She has been trying to be more present in all aspects of her life, to focus on the task at hand rather than be thinking about her to-do list or other distractions. Being present helps her focus and success. Rhonda feels that the devotion helps her to focus in this way.

And to the intentional and devotional time, not just hitting the pause button, but consciously going, I am going to hit the pause button and by doing that, that is going to allow me this opportunity, let me get in the right space, so that I can, you can get through practice without, fly in, sit there, do your notes, get out. But there has to be intention and that’s what the devotion does for me. Breathing would do the same thing. Or something similar. There’s got to be a pause.

**Theme 3.4 Music and Emotion**

Rhonda identified that the music in church makes her very emotional, whether it is listening to the Women’s Trio or singing an old favourite hymn. She also enjoys listening
to contemporary Christian music like Amy Grant and her one of her favourite songs by
her is El Shaddai. “It sounds like a prayer to me, and maybe it is, I don’t know. But it’s
her voice, it’s so pure and I feel like it’s someone being completely open and vulnerable,
‘I’m just baring my soul’ and there’s something about the melody of it.” When asked
how we, as handbell ringers, could bare our souls, she said,

So that’s where I think the whole being in the zone thing is that, is the sense, this
sounds terrible, I’m not trying to be critical, but when it sounds like music. When
it doesn’t sound like 12 people, when it sounds like one piece and I don’t know
how often that happens. We’re getting on top of the notes, our rhythms are good,
we’re starting and stopping at the same spot, most of the time, but I don’t know
how we get to the really musical part, so for me, I guess when I’m really in the
zone is when I feel like I am really making music. I’m not ringing notes, I’m
actually making music.

Theme: 2.5 Visual

One way that Rhonda expresses the emotion of the music is through the physical motion.
For her, moving with the line and in a way that suits the style of the piece connects with
her emotionally and communicates the message better to the congregation. “The way it
looks is very important, so you know me and my silly circles. The way that we ring is
really important to me. That is a really important part for me, not just for the sound. . . .
but there’s something quite beautiful in and I love in a solo or a duet where there’s the
movement up and down. There’s something really artistic or poetic about that.” “There’s
something in the physicality, in the motion, it wouldn’t be the same if I was just sitting
either singing or playing an instrument that didn’t require a lot of movement.”
**Theme 4.2: Music and Message**

Rhonda’s involvement in the handbell choir has made her more aware of the service planning and music selection process.

I appreciate and I know the thought that you put into the selection of the pieces in relation to the services. I don’t know if I would have clued into that, although I know at the beginning it was like ‘what can we manage’ but they’re so tied in now to what’s happening in the service and I really like, I’ll even be sitting there and be like, it’s probably given me a better appreciation for how you build the services because now I see a lot more connection between and I’ll go like ‘oh, and that’s echoed in the anthem, and even your postlude I’m hearing familiar refrains and stuff.’

This is important to her because she feels like the music helps in bringing the message to light. “I feel like if there’s a theme or a message there are many ways of communicating that. Some through scripture, some through the sermon, it could be liturgical dance, it could be the art work that is placed up there and the music, so the bell choir, is another way of expressing that. So people who might not hear it one way, they might get it another way.”

**Theme 4.1 Outreach**

Rhonda defines the church’s mission as, “allowing people to connect, hear God’s Word and act on God’s Word in the church and in the community” She sees the handbell choir as a great way to live out the church’s mission.

I hope that it would allow people that might not have a strong connection or any connection to the church a fun and welcoming way in in terms of joining. Hearing God’s Word: I absolutely feel that because you are very careful with what you pick in terms of reflecting things and themes, I believe I absolutely hear and learn about scripture or a season or whatever through the music. Acting on it: I like it when we ring outside and do different things, they’re always different.
In addition, she feels like ringing out in the greater community is good advertising for the church and increases handbell awareness. “Part of it is just practicality, call it marketing if you want, knowing that we’re advertising the church, that we’re vibrant and has a music program and also spreading the word about handbells and showing people who don’t know what they are and what they sound like and what’s possible.”

4.4 Community Reflections Findings

Data from the interviews and journals was divided into 4 major categories and sub-themes. The chart used in Appendix F was used to narrow down the themes to find the ones that were most common between the interview participants. 5-7 themes were kept for each category. The researcher created a statement describing each theme. For the group discussion for each category, themes were posted on signs around the room and the participants were asked to stand beside a theme that they wished to speak about. The group then discussed the validity of each theme.

4.4.1 Category 1: Music ensembles and Community

Theme 1.1: Community of Support

*Being in a church music group provides me with a community of support and allows me to support others.*

Patricia chose this theme because she strongly agreed with the statement. The church choir has always been a place of support and safety for her and she feels “complete acceptance in the group.” In addition, she feels that she supports other choir members who may not have otherwise joined the choir, and notes that the men take care of one
particular member who has early dementia. Karen also chose this theme because she had mixed feelings about it. Karen was concerned that even though this is ideal for church music groups to provide its members with support, it would not represent all church music groups everywhere. However, all of the participants said that they did feel that this statement was true for them at Trinity United Church.

Rhonda expressed concern that after a person leaves the group (for sickness, other commitments etc.) they may be resistant to members of the group reaching out to them. This affects both the person who has left the group but also the remaining members of the group who are concerned.

Theme 1.2: Church Family

Participating in a church music group provides me with a closer link to my church family.

Rhonda chose to talk about this theme. Nostalgia and tradition are important to her. Her church family has been a very important part of her childhood and she has always sought to be part of a church for this reason. Before being involved in a musical group, she did not realize that the music program could bring her closer to her church family. She states, “I don’t think I would have realized this before being in Jubilate. I don’t think I would have realized that. I feel more part of the big wheel, it’s actually contributing something towards worship and community outreach and stuff like that.”

The others also strongly agree with this theme. Patricia spoke about how growing up her parents would ridicule her for going to church but that the choir provided her with safety and stability. John mentioned that in the rural church he was raised in, most of the
members were actually related! This connects to his current involvement; “that’s why I enjoy being part of this church, I feel like there is a very similar type of feeling to it.”

**Theme 1.3: Variety of People**

*Being a part of my ensemble has introduced me to people I would not have otherwise have met.*

*Each person in the ensemble has something important to contribute.*

John selected this theme because he agreed. He does not work with a team in his professional life and values the opportunity in choir. He noted that it was not just musical skills that people bring to the group. “Each person in the ensemble has something important to contribute. And yeah, I certainly feel that and it’s either their voice, their support for other people”

The rest of the group agreed with the theme and observed that sometimes newer people might not realize that they really are contributing to the music and to the group if they feel like they have a lot to learn. For example, Rhonda mentioned that the bell battery (mid-range bells) might not feel as important because they don’t play the melody or have as many visually fancy techniques. It was agreed that it was important to make sure people feel valued.

**Theme 1.4: Bonding and God**

*Having a shared purpose draws the members of the musical group closer together and therefore closer to God.*

Patricia, John and Karen agreed with this theme. Rhonda is the outlier.

And you know me. I feel like a complete fraud who shouldn’t even be doing this because I really struggle with acknowledging my spirituality. So I would look at that and say, oh for me, I would see that for others that I admired for having a really strong faith, but there’s a lot of self-doubt going on. So I would say most of
it, but the last clause, I wouldn’t immediately identify with. It would be a hope. And maybe it actually happens, I just don’t recognize it.

John feels that having a shared purpose of leading worship and singing sacred texts increases bonding between the members and that as a result he is closer to God. “I think it’s the function of the group. Because we’re there to assist in leading worship, and the words that we sing and the part that we participate in helps to improve my spirituality.”

Patricia adds that she moves into a space when singing in harmony with others. “And you move into that element when you’re singing. It’s like hearing the parts, and I do anyway, I move into this space, I think is quite spiritual. At times, depending on the piece of music.”

Karen observed that because every rehearsal is about getting the music closer to being put together, and because we rehearse and play in a spiritual context, getting closer to playing the piece well over time and getting closer to God get “lumped in together.”

Theme 1.5: Responsibility and Commitment
*I feel a responsibility to other members of the group to attend rehearsals, performances and help out with the running of the ensemble.*

The group felt that this was true, however Rhonda added that she feels both responsibility and guilt. It is not a positive feeling for her. The members of the handbell choir feel the responsibility is greater on them for attending rehearsals (because it is noticed more if one person and their notes are missing). The choir members feel the responsibility of singing an anthem every Sunday.

Theme 1.6: Community leads to God
*When we are in community, God is present.*
*My musical ensemble provides me with a place to come together as a sacred community.*
Patricia says this is true sometimes, as long as she isn’t distracted. Karen said that being new to the congregation helps her feel this very strongly. “I really feel like the bell choir provides me with a place to come together, like it was almost instantly I had a spot where I really felt, you know?” John agreed that it helps him feel like he makes a contribution and he is part of the group.

Rhonda shared a memory about a visitor that came to one of our rehearsals. One handbell rehearsal in January, a disheveled man walked into the bell rehearsal and stood near the front of the room. He began commenting on the music, obviously enjoying it, and peering over the ringer’s shoulders and identifying chords. He spent some time shadow conducting beside me and shared some of his story. He told the group that he used to be a professional jazz musician in the United States but now was unable to work due to bi-polar disorder. He wept at the beauty of the music as we rehearsed. The handbell choir and I acknowledged his comments but tried to continue with our rehearsal in as much of a regular way as we could manage. At the end of the rehearsal as the group was putting away the bells, he asked if he could play a song he had written on the piano for us. He was a wonderful player. He then simply got up off the piano bench and left and we never saw him again. Rhonda said “I felt the sacred community strongest on the evening when that gentleman wandered in.” “If you ever in a music ensemble outside of the church, or maybe even a different church than this, he would not be welcomed, and made to feel valuable in that he was given time to share. He was very moved by the music and that really, that night was when it really hit home for me.”
4.4.2 Category 2: Making Music

Theme 2.1: Challenge and Accomplishment
*It is important to me to be musically challenged and to learn new things.*

Both handbell ringers, Karen and Rhonda, chose this theme because they felt it very important. Patricia brought up that for her own stress level it is important that not all pieces are challenging. The rest of the group agreed that this should be added to the statement. The group acknowledged that they can feel a sense of accomplishment from easier pieces too and that going back to repertoire they have done in the past allows them to see how much they have improved.

Theme 2.2: Harmony
*Harmony connects me to other people and makes me feel enveloped.*

Both choir members chose this theme. John emphasized the importance of people working together, “listening to other people and realizing that we have to work together both for tempo, and for pitch and also for the harmony. That’s what I like about choral singing is that together you make harmony. . . . when you get it, it’s really good.” Patricia agrees, “It’s feeling that locked in feeling with another part. I feel it with the basses because they’re right behind me. The feeling of harmony is really positive. I mean, even the word harmony, taking its other context is part of it.”

The bell ringers stated that they are not as much aware of other parts in particular when there are weaker ringers beside you so that the harmony is not locked in together.
**Theme 2.3: Variety**

*Having a variety of musical styles and sounds in the music I make is important to me and to the church. I also enjoy having a variety of instruments in the service.*

All of the participants validated this theme. They find this important not just for their own preferences or to keep them interested, although that is part of it, but because they want to acknowledge and include and satisfy a wide variety of preferences in the congregation. Patricia pointed out that a variety of musical styles “goes with this whole idea of feeling comfortable with everybody--the whole sense of community. If we didn’t have that sense of community we might feel more uncomfortable about trying different things. We are all in it together and we’re willing to give it a go.” Karen agreed, “And it acknowledges the variety in the community too.”

**Theme 2.4: Quality**

*The lyrics and music of a song must be of high quality and complement each other.*

Three of the participants said that they agreed with this theme. Of note, Patricia said that it’s important to her and that she finds poorly written music and lyrics distracting from her ability to worship. “If I feel it’s badly written, I have trouble with it. Then that blocks my ability to . . . or I start trying to figure out how to change it.”

Initially, Rhonda said that the fit of the music and lyrics together had never occurred to her, however after the group discussed the topic, she was able to relate to the theme and told the story of when I gave them the lyrics and story of a piece they were ringing (It Is Well with My Soul). Understanding the story behind the music changed the way they rang from loud and choppy to gentle and smooth, reflecting the nature of the message of the song. This shows that it is not just the composer’s job to provide a good quality piece
that complements the lyric, but also the musician’s job to play or sing in such a way that reflects the intent of the piece.

**Theme 2.5: Visual**

*The way the ensemble looks when they sing or play is important.*

This had never occurred to John as a choir member. He would have thought of that in theatre, but not in choir. This may be because at Trinity the choir sits in the choir loft facing the congregation and cannot see the chancel step where the bell ringers stand to ring so they are never the people watching. The handbell ringers had a lot to say about this theme. Rhonda says is really matters for the bell choir. They are aware that grimaces when wrong notes are rung, serious faces, not lining up circles with one another, frantic changes in bell techniques etc. can be distracting “they (a member of the congregation) said they had to close their eyes because there was too much going on. And they really enjoyed hearing it, but they couldn’t watch it because it was just too busy.”

Karen said that as a member of the congregation she notices how the choir looks. “They sit there and they just look nice and natural. They might laugh if there’s something funny going on, but almost everywhere else I’ve ever seen even though the director’s constantly telling them people can see you, they do all kinds of stuff that doesn’t fit with the service.”

4.4.3 **Category 3: Personal experience of music and spirituality**

**Theme 3.1: Meditation**

*Making music allows me to enter a meditative space.*
Rhonda chose this one. She defines the meditative space as “a space where I’m absolutely present.” She also finds the demands of bell ringing give her a break from her daily life, “I find that I can’t think about anything else when I’m in bells because I’m like where are we and what’s coming up and do I have a weave or did I get that bell or what’s happening down there…. So it almost forces me to enter a meditative space which I really value.” The other bell ringer, Karen, said that she feels a “heightened awareness” where she feels like her actions are in slow motion and she is able to reach everything because the heightened awareness gives her more time. The two singers feel this less but within the anthem they say it can be true.

The group then had a discussion about the merits of memorizing music allowing for full immersion in the music allowing the musician to be “in the zone.” John says that when he has something memorized, “you’re completely immersed, you have to listen, you have to pay attention to the conductor.” There was a consensus that in knowing a piece of music better then the musician is more able to stop thinking about the right notes and rhythms and is more likely to engage with the music at a spiritual level as a form of self-expression, worship or meditation.

**Theme 3.6: Intent**

*It is important that a person making music in church is genuinely engaged in the activity and the message they are conveying.*

Karen chose this theme because she thought it was “a bit iffy.” She felt that it is ideal but that in reality it is hard to judge the level of engagement for each individual because they come from such varied backgrounds. “Everyone is at a different place in the journey. And what for one person might be considered genuinely engaged in the activity might be
completely different for someone else completely engaged.” However, the group decided that it is important for the ensemble to be “on board” with the message of the piece and to be present in the music making. Patricia mentioned, “sometimes I’ll be singing and I’ll look down and I’ll see someone who is looking really skeptical or worried and you think, what are they thinking? What are we doing wrong? Why aren’t we connecting with this person?” The group suggested the following change to the statement: “There is value in a person making music in church to be genuinely engaged in the activity and the message they are conveying.”

Theme 3.7: Music and memory
Music helps connect me to my past and brings back memories.

John chose this theme. He said that coming back to regular involvement in the United Church after time away brings back memories of his mother singing in the choir and other church members from his past. The rest of the group felt that music helped to connect them with their past, except for Karen, who said that in doing music 60 hours a week for her career, “there are so many memories you basically ignore them.”

Theme 3.2: Absorbed into Music
Sometimes when I am making music I find myself fully immersed in music making instead of concentrating on notes and techniques.

Rhonda, who has the least musical experience in the group, says this has happened to her maybe 3 times over the 5 years she has been ringing bells. She identifies that it only happens when she knows the music really well. John and Patricia enjoy singing music that they have sung many times before for this reason. Karen, a more proficient musician, says she feels the immersion “most of the time.”
John expressed the significance of a musician being absorbed in the music. “I think that the congregation sense that as well. I think they get it you’re engaged in what you’re doing. They sense that.”

**Theme 3.3: Offering to God**

*Making music in church is/is not my personal offering to God.*

The group feels that this is true but does not replace financial offering and does not excuse you from serving the church in other ways. Rhonda is the outlier in this category. She lacks confidence and struggles with seeing her music as a gift to God. “I don’t think that God is a very judgmental God but I still think- what do I have to offer?” She also feels that “I just don’t get to the space where I would see the music as an offering. My music as an offering. For you guys all, it’s fine. No, I think that it’s something in that it’s me making it. I can absolutely see your anthems being offerings, but…” The choir members then reassured her that they don’t always feel great about their anthem but the congregation often surprises them when they are told the effect that it had on members of the congregation. Rhonda is surprised “It’s interesting when you think of that because it’s such a gift to me when you sing. I never thought…” The choir members then expressed that they feel that the bell choir offers them a great gift when they ring.

**Theme 3.4: Music and Emotion**

*Music moves me emotionally.*

Patricia said that she feels strongly that this theme is true. John and Karen said that the music moves them emotionally because of the connection to God and to the community. Rhonda said she has trouble getting there as a musician. She watches other people
express their emotions through their music making and wishes she could do so but feels self-conscious. However, there have been a couple of glimpses when she really knew the music and allowed herself to lean into what she was doing.

**Theme 3.5: Transformation**

*Experiences, thoughts or messages I have making music in my ensemble stay with me throughout the week and affect the way I live my life.*

Again, the group decided that “sometimes” needs to be added to this statement.

They decided that both the music and the musician are transformed through making music in the ensemble. The music is transformed as it improves with each rehearsal and changes when it is played in front of the congregation. John says that the musical experience changes when you have an audience. The music in the worship experience is different to rehearsal or the warm up.

The musician also is transformed through participation. Karen reflected on the transformation between beginning and end of a rehearsal. “You get into rehearsal and who knows what you’re coming from but people feel good at the end. They feel connected. That could be the most important transformation for lots of people.” “You know, in our lives, that’s pretty good! I think a lot of people live for that. Often for individuals the church ensemble might be the most important thing in their week. For them, personally. I don’t mean it’s more important than family or anything like that. That’s the thing, always they’re looking forward to it and afterwards they’re happy and looking forward to the next one.” Patricia feels the transformation during the rehearsal. “You’re moving into this other space. Nothing else exists; you’re just dealing with the music and trying to do it right. There’s nothing else. And that’s the transformation.”
In addition, through the week the musician may worry about a difficult passage or reflect on the text of a song, changing their actions. Rhonda said that more negative stuff than positive stuff stays with her throughout the week. She expressed that she may think about a lack of confidence in getting her part, worrying about another member of the group, or a strange interchange with someone. She feels good immediately following rehearsal but through the week worries.

4.4.4 Category 4: Music ensembles in the church and worship

Theme 1.7: Safe Place
The church and the musical ensembles provide a safe and supportive environment.

John picked this one. He feels that the community provides support to its members and that is part of the purpose of the group. The others say it is not only important but also foundational, and non-negotiable. They feel that it belongs with the community category rather than the role of the music program in the church

Theme 4.1: Outreach
A music ensemble should go into the greater community to provide musical support to others as representation from Trinity.

Rhonda chose this one. She expressed 2 main reasons. First, new venues and audiences enrich the ensemble. Second, being out in the community is good for recruiting and spreads the word about who we are and what we do. Karen agreed and mentioned that music programs are often used to recruit people to schools and that we can use our music program in a similar way. The choir members spoke about using outreach and ministry in the community. They remembered our trip to the hospital before Christmas and how
meaningful it was both to them and to the patients and nursing staff. Rhonda says, “we have a very unique bridge between a spiritual community and people who may be not even necessarily open to a spiritual community because music is a common language.”

Theme 4.4: Contribution to the Church

*Being in an ensemble at Trinity is/is not a contribution to the church.*

I asked this question of the group because I thought that not all of them felt that they were contributing to the church, in particular Rhonda as a result of her interview. However, the group suggested that I delete this point. They all said that they think it is a contribution—a giving of one’s time to the church—and that participation is only a fun thing for them to do. This may suggest a change in Rhonda as she has gone through this process of discussion and reflection with others.

Theme 4.2: Music provides a message

*Music should support the worship service by emphasizing the theme or message in a different way.*

The group agreed with this theme and mentioned that it is important also to have a variety of music in the worship service.

Theme 4.3: Leadership

*Musical ensembles provide leadership to the congregation.*

Karen chose this theme. She thinks it’s true but that music ensembles do more than just provide leadership. She says that music ensembles facilitate worship. “They enable people to have more variety of experience and immersion and to experience worship so they act as facilitators as well as leaders.”
There was then a discussion about other churches they have visited with the lack of a choir or good music program and how that affects the worship experience. They feel rich about their own experience and annoyed at the other churches.

4.5 Presentation of Group Statements

At the end of each main category in the group discussion, the participants were asked as a group to create an overall statement that represents a summary of their perspective on each category.

4.5.1 Statement 1: Music ensembles and Community

*By creating something bigger than ourselves, and better than what was there before, music ensembles offer opportunity to enrich our relationships with each other and the community.*

It was important to the group that this statement acknowledges that the church community exists without the music ensemble, but that the music ensemble makes the community stronger. Also, in creating music together, we are combining efforts of each individual to create something that no individual can produce. The group felt that the statement should acknowledge that a musical group fosters connection, “between self and music, between people in the group, between the congregation and whoever is offering the music.” Adding the word “opportunity” in the statement was to acknowledge that relationships do not always become enriched for those in a musical ensemble. Finally, mentioning both the community between group members and the greater community was added to the statement.
4.5.2 Statement 2: Making Music

*We take pleasure in presenting quality music that is satisfying to ourselves and allows for connection to the congregation.*

In creating a statement about music making in general, not necessarily in a church, the group began by listing the things that were important to them; being challenged, having harmony, etc. The group decided there were two things missing from my themes in this category:

1. It is important that individuals from the group are featured for solos. They thought that it added to variety and might be included under that theme. It was felt that an individual statement from a soloist was different to group communication.
2. They thought it important to include the “audience” or congregation when making music.

The group felt that in creating the statement they wanted to say that it was important how making music makes the participant feel. It was in feeling personally satisfied through challenge, harmony, etc. that they could then provide music that connected to the congregation. Acknowledging that a connection is not always made, the group added as a clause that they enjoy when this occurs.

4.5.3 Statement 3: Personal experience of music and spirituality

*Authentic engagement in the music making process can lead to emotional and spiritual transcendence and transformation.*

In order for church music group participation to nurture spirituality, the group feels the participant must be authentically engaged in music making in this context. Although each
person comes into the rehearsal or worship service with a different background and journey, engaging fully in the text and music is key in order to experience any sort of emotional or spiritual transformation. This transformation can happen through becoming absorbed in the music. It was felt that the absorption theme could include the mediation theme. Rhonda expressed that if she could successfully become immersed and absorbed into the music, an offering to God could follow. For her, transcendence is when she can get “out of her head.”

4.5.4 Statement 4: Music ensembles in the church and worship

Music ensembles contribute to the church
by providing leadership, facilitating worship and enhancing the theme or message.
Going out into the greater community through musical outreach
benefits both the community and the church.

For this category, the group wanted to come up with a two-part statement. The first about how the ensembles contribute to the worship and the second about outreach. It was considered important to acknowledge the ensembles as both demonstrators and encouragers for the congregation in encouraging congregational involvement in what the ensemble is doing. The group also wanted to ensure that the benefits of outreach were mentioned for both the church and the greater community.
5 Discussion of results and implications for ministry

5.1 Discussion of Group Statements

5.1.1 Music and Community

“By creating something bigger than ourselves, and better than what was there before, music ensembles offer opportunity to enrich our relationships with each other and the community”

Bigger Than ourselves and better than what was there before

Church music groups do not create music for music’s sake. They are interested in art and beauty, but are more interested in using music to create something “bigger than ourselves” and “better than what was there before.” They see the wonder of joining together as a community and participating in something that one person cannot do alone. One person cannot sing harmony or ring handbell music without another person. Just as in the Barbershop ensemble that Stebbins describes, “This singer has experienced the sensation of being part of a musical sound that surpasses the individual contributions of the participants and takes on an identity of its own.”\(^{119}\) In the church ensembles too, the sum is greater than the parts and what was there before has been made better.

Furthermore, “bigger than ourselves” means that they make music in order to express greater purpose. As Viladesau described music as a way to experience God’s presence and a medium of communication to God,\(^{120}\) the choir or handbell choir makes music to experience more than what is physically present. They use music to “help with the

\(^{119}\) Pitts, 63.  
\(^{120}\) Viladesau, 158.
healing” as one journal participant wrote and “open up to what is possible” as Rhonda suggested.

To be create something bigger than ourselves and better than what was there before is for the church to connect to God. As Johnson said, “Belonging to God is both a personal and a communal experience, because we are called into relationship with God and with one another.”121 By joining together in this common purpose, koinonia, as “an intimate bond of sharing that is established by participation in a shared reality”122 is acknowledged to be present in these ensembles.

*Enrich our relationships with each other*

As members of the church, each person has a “church family” connection to the other members. As Latini said, “Believers are united to each other, belonging first to each other.”123 Many of the musicians know each other through other church activities or from outside of the church, from other work or recreational commitments. The musical group enriches the already inherent relationships between the members of the group. Just as Stephanie Pitts reported that in the Gilbert and Sullivan production, “making music with others was shown to affirm a sense of belonging and like-minded endeavor, sustaining commitment and offering a shared experience that fostered memories and friendships among a diverse group of people,”124 so it is true in the church music group.

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121 Johnson, 7.
122 Dougherty, 8.
123 Latini, 90.
124 Pitts, 53.
Safety and diversity were important themes that emerged in the data. In particular, for Patricia, the choir was her “safe haven.” As such, it was deemed important that the group provide a safe and supportive environment for the participants. The group felt that it was important to be inclusive to all people and that getting to know a variety of people with whom they would not have otherwise had a chance to bond was a benefit. Music groups can provide a safe place for community to develop if the group has an attitude of inclusiveness and openness. The participants saw the creation of a safe place for all as an extension of their faith. The emphasis in the church of being a place where all are welcome, neighbours are loved and people help one another is extended into the welcome of the church musical group.

As Day identified a fellowship as a community that “exists as a community not for its own sake but the redemptive purpose of God,”¹²⁵ so the participants feel that their musical groups are more than a social group but that they exist for a multi-layered purpose that benefits themselves, the church and the community. The bonding that occurs over rehearsals, shared anxiety and joys of a successful performance, each under the purpose of creating individual and corporate relationships with God, creates koinonia between the church members. This distinction is important to the members of the group, distinguishing their experience from that of a community music group or a secular group of another type. Recalling one journal entry, “During choir practice I always feel comfort and belonging and often joy. The comfort and belonging comes from the satisfaction of being with and working with people who share many of the same thoughts, beliefs and

¹²⁵ Day, 33.
attitudes.” It is easy to fall into a pattern of rehearsing the music and losing touch with the group’s purpose. Devotions at the beginning of rehearsal, praying together and thoughtful outreach projects help remind the participants of their shared purpose.

One can underestimate the importance of the musical group’s support for one another. As a result of bonding as church members, the members in turn care for one another. Great concern was expressed over members who have left the group or about members who needed help in order to participate. Care is taken to ensure that each person is given any assistance possible, whether that be in remembering where they put their music, giving rides to rehearsals, providing a listening ear for a person who is grieving or delivering food and a card to someone who is sick. These actions not only express the relationship between the members, they strengthen it.

Viewing the church musical group in this light illuminates the work of the church in caring for its members. Perhaps a more formalized relationship is needed between each musical group and the Pastoral Care committee of the church so that a representative from the choir and handbell choirs would receive training in pastoral care and keep a consciousness around what is being done for musical groups members both within the musical group and throughout the church.

*Enrich our relationship with the community*

A choir or handbell choir has a ministry to those outside of the church. “Ministry is the response to God’s love and the desire to live out of that love within the world. Ministry is
experiential, relational and transformative.” The desire of the group to function not just as a community, but as a sacred community, prompts them to act with love towards one another. Rhonda said, “I felt the sacred community strongest on the evening when that gentleman wandered in,” about the love shown to the bell choir’s unexpected visitor and the sharing that followed. John expressed how meaningful singing at the hospital was for him, the nursing staff and the patients. Through making music as an expression of love for others, the community gives love back, strengthening the relationship between the church and the world.

As part of the ministry of music in the church, the musical groups should come up with outreach projects to ensure that they are connecting with the wider church and the greater community. Communication between the musical groups and other church committees is important in this regard so that the mission of the church is consistent and church congregants and leadership are aware of what groups in the church are doing.

5.1.2 Making Music

“We take pleasure in presenting quality music that is satisfying to ourselves and allows for connection to the congregation”

Presenting Quality Music

Presenting quality music is meaningful to the musicians who are making the music. Having lyrics that suit the music allows the musician to enter into the music more easily, as does having lyrics and music that are of good quality so that the musician is not

\[126\] Martin, 15.
distracted by its flaws. Even music editing, including good page turns for bell ringers, and clear type, play into the musician’s experience. The musician’s experience is transmitted to the congregation through the music itself and through body language, thereby either improving or decreasing the congregation’s experience of the music. Eliminating these distractions by selecting well constructed music is a simple but vital criteria when picking music.

Satisfying to ourselves

There are a lot of factors that contribute to a piece of music being satisfying to the musician. Three recurring themes in the data were challenge, the use of harmony and musical variety. Challenge gives the participants a sense of accomplishment. It “wakes me up” said Karen and “uses a different part of my brain” said Rhonda. Challenge, as long as it is reasonable, can be fun! This is certainly something to consider when selecting repertoire for a group. Knowing the musicians and what will be achievable but stimulating can allow for musical development and a sense of accomplishment and pride.

The group noted that harmony was a contributor to musical satisfaction. As a SATB choir and a handbell choir, the groups always make music in harmony. Perhaps the learning here is that attention can be drawn in rehearsal to how the parts interact with one another and work together. Harmony also represents the working together of the individuals in the group. The satisfaction of harmony is not just one of enjoying the auditory phenomenon, but one of enjoying making music with others. As we recall, “Communal singing simultaneously demands both sounding and listening, both receiving and giving,
both self-awareness and attention to what is outside of self, both an inviting in and a giving out”\(^{127}\)

The singers and ringers also gain satisfaction from a variety of musical styles, instrumental combinations and techniques that they present and hear others present. The variety keeps the musician from being bored, but moreover, they said that variety allows them to hear the message in a new way. John wanted to ensure that soloists were mentioned as contributors to their musical experience, as Rhonda mentioned that the drummers added life to service music. For the handbell ringers, different handbell techniques utilizing the foam, mallets and hands in different ways creates dynamic and mood changes in the music. Variety, they said, is also representative of a diverse congregation. They desire to be able to make music that will touch different people at different times. For Trinity United, a variety of musical styles and groups are desired. Selecting choir and handbell music that uses different techniques and combinations adds to the satisfaction of the musicians.

*Connects to congregation*

Here, the statement evokes Paintner’s notion of receptive musical engagement.\(^{128}\) There is a clear difference between listening to music and making music. Both give opportunities for a spiritual connection. Connecting to the congregation emphasizes the role of the listener. Patricia spoke about her own receptive musical engagement when

\(^{127}\) Harmon, 51.

\(^{128}\) Paintner and Beckman, 94.
listening to the children sing, as she felt drawn “inwards and upwards.” Connecting to the congregation and allowing them to enter in the shared experience of the music gives the choir and handbell ringers’ pleasure. Karen remembered when she played an improvisation on chimes at a friend’s funeral how it felt like she was expressing what the congregation could not. Through facilitating worship, the musical groups engage the congregation in praise and prayer. Connecting to the congregation in this way makes the musician feel more part of the congregation and gives them a sense that they are contributing to the church. Clearly, rehearsals are not enough. Participating in worship and having a listener for the music that they are making is an integral part of the mission of the church musical group.

5.1.3  **Personal Experience of music and spirituality**

“*Authentic engagement in the music making process can lead to emotional and spiritual transcendence and transformation*”

*Authentic engagement in the music making process*

Apart from “Receptive engagement,” Paintner’s other form of musical engagement is “expressive” engagement. Paintner and Beckman, 95 This occurs when the musician is actually making the music. It suggests that in order to be making music, the musician must be expressing themselves and not just playing notes and rhythms. In order to be authentically engaged, the musician must be, as Adnams suggested, “really worshipping, not just singing.” Adnams, 186.

The discussion yielded that the level of engagement and what is meant by engagement

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129 Paintner and Beckman, 95

130 Adnams, 186.
differs from person to person, and from week to week depending on the individual’s own spiritual journey and what is happening in their life that week. Authentic, according to the research group, simply meant to be in line with the musician’s truth, whatever that is that week. It was an acknowledgement that in order for any sort of emotional or spiritual connection or transformation, there must be an openness from the musician and that it is not the sole responsibility of the conductor or of the Holy Spirit.

Impeding authentic engagement are distractions. These may be distractions of daily life, or, distractions of the mechanics of the music. Just as Miller said, “In order to let go, or unlearn, the student usually engages in some form of spiritual practice” the musicians sometimes had difficulty letting go of distractions. As one person wrote, “I find I am very focused on getting it right, and forget about God,” this shows a willingness to engage with the spiritual aspect of the music, but that the difficult task of executing the music prevents spiritual engagement. Distractions of all sorts show up throughout the journals and interviews. Stress at work or home, health issues, excitement, rushing into rehearsals, interpersonal conflict in the group, the mechanics of making music, and poor music quality, just to name a few. It seems that only if a fragile scenario occurs, can a person engage at a very deep level.

However, all things working well, being fully engaged may result in what the participants referred to as being “in the zone” or “in the music.” This concept was explained by Woody and McPherson as, “A self-rewarding feeling of flow can be attained when people are so engaged in an activity that they lose self-consciousness, feel

\[131\] Miller, 96.
a merging of awareness and action, and even lose track of time.” They theorized that the emotional expression of the performer adds value to the life of the musician, inducing enjoyment and encouraging them to make music again. The interviews determined that in order for this type of engagement to occur, it is helpful to know the music really well, to be comfortable with it even to the point of memorization. This knowledge can affect the way that rehearsals are structured, the frequency in which music is repeated and the level of difficulty of music selected. Giving the ensemble a chance to know the music really well, or even memorize it increases their experience, lowers anxiety and allows them to move into a more spiritual space. This is reflected in Rhonda and some other journals descriptions of not feeling that they were able to get past the mechanics of the music to really express the message. This would recommend a change in my ministry, as for the choir I rarely repeat anthems within 3 years and purchase at least one brand new piece a month. For the handbell choir, we have never repeated a piece (partly because we are a new group with a limited library and partially because we are preparing for festivals where the music is determined for us).

Emotional and Spiritual transcendence and transformation

Emotion can be revelatory. “Feelings are a source of information about how we view God, ourselves and others.” “Our feelings may show us what we really believe about God.” When Karen’s sang “The Confession Stone” she learned something about God

132 Woody and McPherson, 403.
133 Fryling, 57.
134 Fryling, 57.
and the story of Jesus through the emotion in the music. Both the way that the lyric was written from the perspective of Jesus’ mother and the musical composition, using repetition or calling for Jesus and a sighing “Ah” to express distress, engaged Karen’s emotions and changed the way that she thought about the story. It would be helpful to spend more time both connecting the music a group is doing to the scripture or the message and having participants identify and share how the music makes them feel.

When applying Lonergan’s theory of knowing to music, we first empirically experience the confluence of music, sound and spiritual connection. Second, intellectually, we remember what has happened. Third, rationally, we reflect on the memory. Lastly we make a decision to faithfully live out our experiences. There are many examples in the journals and interviews of people’s mood, thoughts and actions being transformed as a result of their musical participation. For example, one journal entry spoke of how they were experiencing tension before the service, but “the whole was resolved with the singing of the anthem.” A simple change of mood between the beginning and end of the rehearsal or an anthem getting stuck in a person’s head so that the lyrics influence their actions at work provide a ministry to the participant, a gift of discernment, wisdom or inner peace.

The choir or handbell rehearsal is not simply a means to learn the music necessary for worship. For the musicians, this weekly gathering is a Bible study, a support group, a way to be regularly at church, a place of transformation and an avenue of self-discovery.

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135 Heaney, 150.
Patricia said, “I think our society is so goal oriented and so achievement oriented the process gets sometimes not considered to be as important as what happens at the end.” This is very similar to Christine Valters Paintner’s “pilgrimage of the art making process.” The journey of learning the music is just as important as the final product to the musicians. Karen’s opinion that “the other transformation I think in this day and age is really important is the transformation between [how] you come in at the beginning of rehearsal and how you feel afterwards,” emphasizes the short-term benefit to the church musician. For John, the rehearsal and worship have different purposes. “The rehearsal is where you examine the lyrics and the music and you make that your own. Sunday morning is when you share that. It’s a different process. One is internal and the other external.” This points towards the advantage of a weekly meeting outside of worship, rather than “pick up” choirs or other occasional arrangements.

Acknowledging the rehearsal or worship’s ability to transform life outside of rehearsal it is also to remember that outside life can influence a person entering rehearsal or worship. It is easy to be distracted by problems at home, work or health. Giving space for a person to leave their day by focusing on a devotion or warm up at the start of rehearsal or simply giving understanding to an off day will give the person an opportunity to receive emotional and spiritual transformation. Allowing opportunities for interpersonal interaction—formal or informal—opportunities for them to contribute to the running of the ensemble provides them with a sense of purpose, ministry and ownership, all of which can lead to emotional and spiritual transformation.

136 Paintner and Beckman, 17.
According to Saliers, “It’s not just the music itself, but the context in which it is made and the collective or individual memories that are associated with that music that add to the spiritual power of music.”\(^{137}\) An individual’s personal history and memories have a huge influence on their ability to enter into a spiritual place. Patricia’s memories of her Grandmother give her a portal to connecting with her spirituality. John’s memories about his rural church growing up are revisited when we sing certain hymns. For Rhonda, sometimes memories associated with music can be a distraction. The new inclusive lyrics to her Explorer Unit’s hymn “This Is My Father’s World”\(^{138}\) bother her because of the connection to her past. While we can acknowledge that for each individual, memories can either be a distraction or avenue of connection to God, we cannot allow one person’s memory to determine the musical selections for Sunday worship. However, acknowledging the power of music and memory for a person can help us understand a person’s reaction to a particular piece of music or help them understand why it affects them in that way.

5.1.4 Music ensembles in the church and worship

“Music ensembles contribute to the church by providing leadership, facilitating worship and enhancing the theme or message. Going out into the greater community through musical outreach benefits both the community and the church.”


\(^{138}\) Babcock.
Contribute to the church by providing leadership, facilitating worship and enhancing the theme or message

As much as the musicians in a church music group benefit from their participation, the choir and handbell choir members feel like they are contributing to the worship service and assisting with enabling the congregation to worship. They do not feel like this service excludes them from other work in the church (on committees, ritual functions in worship etc.) or financial obligations. As “music can lead the mind to the sacred in three different but interconnected ways: by being the bearer or accompaniment to sacred words, gestures, or motions; by association with emotions characteristic of religious psychological states; and by the manifestation of beauty as the sign of the transcendental goal of human spirit.”

Having the choir sing at funerals is a way that the choir feels, and the families acknowledge, that the choir is contributing to the funeral service. Here, the choir has the potential to contribute in all three of the ways outlined by Viladesau. The choir accompanies the sacred words and rituals of the funeral, often singing Psalm 23 or providing the blessing. The music they sing is selected in conjunction with the family to express a connection to the emotions, memories and text the family wishes to have at the service. Third, the choir’s musical expression of love for the family and friends through the music is one of beauty. This is truly a ministry of the choir and absolutely a contribution to the church. It is good to acknowledge the choir and this function both to the choir and to the congregation.

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139 Viladesau, 43.
Enhancing the theme or message is based in the premise that the music selected for a given Sunday has a lyric or mood that reflects the theme or scripture being presented by the minister in their sermon, prayers etc. This is largely out of the group members control, however, it is of note that the participants found a well fitting piece important to their ability to facilitate worship for themselves and for others. Multiple handbell ringers mentioned how incorporating the scripture reading for “Into the Wilderness”\textsuperscript{140} into the piece gave them a “heightened experience of the meaning of the scripture.” Ensuring that the musicians are aware of how their music will fit into the upcoming service is helpful for their interpretation of a piece even though sometimes spontaneous revelation can be equally as powerful.

\textit{Going out into the greater community through musical outreach benefits both the community and the church.}

Just as Anne Martin expressed the give and take of the relationship between the church and the world,\textsuperscript{141} the participants in the study outlined the significance of their outreach projects and how they felt it was mutually beneficial. Through developing their own sense of God’s love, the musicians feel called to action to participate in musical outreach in other churches, with other choirs and handbell choirs, at community events and in venues like the Town Hall, nursing homes and hospital. In turn, the participants grow and learn from the people at these other venues.

\textsuperscript{140} Krug.

\textsuperscript{141} Martin, 15.
The musicians also emphasized that often musical outreach turns into recruitment for the music program. People find out what happens at the church and are inspired to join, often leading to greater involvement in other aspects of the church. This is yet another way that the participants feel that they are contributing to the church, through inviting others in and helping the church to grow. Being open to non-church members joining the church music programs should be accepted and encouraged. While some may criticize the ability of these new members to facilitate worship when they do not have an established faith life, we must remember, “words in songs are sounds we can feel before they are statements to understand.”\textsuperscript{142} It is through musical participation that understanding and faith can develop, regardless of a person’s previous history with the church.

5.2 Music, Mission and the Contemporary Context

As people join music programs, they find themselves part of a community and discover many benefits as they bond with the group. Music is a valuable tool for bringing people together in community. These music programs can act as an antidote for the community-starvation discussed in Putnam’s book.\textsuperscript{143} Choirs and handbell choirs encourage their members to commit to weekly rehearsals, performances, and assistance running the ensemble. Occasionally, members feel guilty when they are not able to fulfill their commitments. This feeling of guilt must be handled with compassion, but shows us the ownership they feel in the group and the responsibility that they have to the other members. The journals and interviews demonstrate the value of the support and care each

\textsuperscript{142} Adnams, 189.

\textsuperscript{143} Putnam, 48.
person receives from the other members of the ensemble. Through participation in a church music group, the musicians discover the value of Christian community. Likewise, joining church music groups to learn and make music gives people the confidence they may not otherwise have in a society that values professional musicians over amateurs. Giving people the chance to express themselves through music feeds their faith life and allows them to minister to others.

This data can be put in conversation with the Mission Statement of Trinity United Church to examine how the choir and handbell choir are fulfilling the mission of the church.

Trinity United Church’s Mission Statement is comprised of four parts:

*Trinity United Church is a community of faith, gathered to experience and respond to God in worship, service and participation in the Christian life:*

The choir and handbell choirs, as part of the community of faith of Trinity United Church, are also sub-communities. They gather both at rehearsal and for worship to experience God through music, and in response, serve the congregation and community through facilitating worship and community outreach.

*Through worship, to hear the message and mission of Jesus as revealed in the Biblical word and human experience.*

Through devotions, lyrics, musical study and worship participation, the members of the ensembles hear the message and mission of Jesus. Hearing God’s Word influences the way in which the ensemble makes music, hopefully communicating it more effectively to the congregation during worship.

*Through service, to care for others, to seek justice and peace in the world, and to*
preserve the earth as a trust from God.

As the music ensembles care for one another through support and care for those in the community for whom they make music, they are acting out their faith in service to God. Through support, prayers, and cards the members celebrate each other’s joys and grieve with each other. The music ensembles do not have a direct focus on seeking justice and peace in the world or preserving the earth, other than that as their mission as part of the greater church, but in small but significant ways they engage in and model compassion, care and right relationship.

Through participation in the Christian life, to become aware of the power and action of God’s love in human affairs.

As participants in the church music groups, the participants became increasingly aware of the power and action of God’s love. This is perhaps best shown through the transformations that occur in their lives as a result of their participation.

5.3 Spirituality

In order to address how being a part of a church musical group nurtures the participants’ spiritual life, it is helpful to recall the United Church of Canada’s working definition of Spirituality and correlate it with the relevant findings/themes emerging from this research.

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**Points of Spirituality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A dynamic dimension of the Spirit of God within us – body, mind and soul</th>
<th>Themes from Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| That which calls us into relationship with God, self, community (others) and creation (environment) as we journey through life and beyond. | • Theme 3.2 Absorbed in music  
• Theme 3.1 Meditation  
• Theme 3.5 Transformation  
• Aspects of Koinonia  
• Theme 1.4 Bonding and God  
• Theme 1.6 Community leads to God  
• Theme 4.1 Outreach  
• Theme 6.1 Intent  
• Theme 3.5 Transformation  
• Self discovery  
• Theme 3.4 Expressing emotion  
• Theme 3.7 Music and memory  
• Theme 4.2 Worship participation  
• Theme 4.1 Offering to God  
• Theme 3.1 Meditation  
• Theme 3.5 Transformation  
• Theme 4.3 Outreach |
| That which calls us to explore our identity (who am I?), our purpose and place in living (why am I here?), and how we live our lives (What values do I hold?) |  
| That which calls us to prayer, worship, and enlightenment, and draws us into the mystery, wonder, awe, and an openness to God’s breaking through (grace). |  
| That which gives us awareness of God’s Presence and Grace in our lives, affirms our being, and empowers us to move from despair to hope, meaning and contentment. |  

From this chart, it is clear that church music programs nurture the participant’s connection to God and greater purpose through acting through small group ministry with one another and through the act of making music. When Gladen said, “People are hungry for love, purpose, and life transformation, and I know of no better structure than a small group where this happens naturally and personally,” he was addressing the benefits of any small group in the church. However, the benefit of musical groups over other groups in the church (Bible study groups, committees, division work etc.) is that making music

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145 Fullarton and Fleming.  
146 Gladen, 7.
has a powerful connection to accessing the musician’s spiritual life. Betsey Beckman asks us to “consider the possibility that a primary way we can experience the revelation of God’s mystery is through the process of our own creative expression.”

When Karen was writing music, she would often look back at what she had just written and discover that her musical expression revealed something she had not consciously known about how she felt about the text. She described a time where she was setting the Lord’s Prayer to music: “I would be surprised, when I would look at things, how I felt about certain words—certain parts, not specific words necessarily, but certain ideas in things that I had . . . and I got to know myself.”

One of the difficulties for participants was both finding the words to express how musical group participation nurtures their spiritual life, but also finding the confidence to speak about their spirituality. Patricia said, “well I think it’s increasingly difficult to try and demonstrate your spirituality in our society and I think probably Trinity mostly, unless people are in the right hand side of the camp religiously. . . and I think example is the best teacher so the way you behave in the world, what kind of a life you live and how you deal with people and that’s representative of your faith and how you see yourself in this church.” There is a fear that if a person reveals themselves as a Christian that they will have assumptions made about them and the participants worried about people thinking that they were trying to convert the other person if they spoke about their connection to the church. The consensus seems to be to hope that if their church connection is discovered, that their actions will speak well of their faith and of the church.

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147 Paintner and Beckman, 3.
Rhonda specifically commented on how the people at Trinity United Church do not talk to each other about their reasons for going to church or their faith.

When we are in community God is present. Which sounds like he’s not there when we’re just on our own, but I feel like especially because we’re United church people and we’re so not good talking about this, that I feel like it’s a way for us to say we are gathering in his name or we are here because of him without actually saying it. Like I feel about that about Sunday, we’re all coming there for the same reason, it’s church it’s not coffee time at Tim Hortons and we do scripture and sermon and hymns and all of that but there’s very little conversation at coffee hour about that.

This insecurity around speaking about God and spirituality is a concern. It is unfortunate if, in an effort to be inclusive, persons feel that they should not express their beliefs or share their experiences of the presence of God. How is the church to provide spiritual support if congregants’ understanding of their shared purpose remains unspoken? Perhaps the first significant step is to create and nurture spaces where such conversations can take place. Music groups provide such a place.

5.4 Consequences of Study Participation

Participating in the process of journaling, interviews and the group discussion had an effect on the way that the participants thought about their church music group participation. They became increasingly conscious about their reasons for being part of the group, and became more intentional about their time spent in rehearsal and in worship as a result. Patricia mentioned, “It’s in doing this that we go to practice and start thinking. I’ve started certainly thinking from talking to Debbie and the questions she’s asked me. I’ve started thinking quite differently sometimes about the actual practice.” Patricia also indicated that through the process she had discovered things about herself. “Until you interviewed me it never occurred to me that when I first started going to church that I felt
it was a safe haven.” Karen discovered that rehearsals have as much if not more impact on her as a member of the ensemble as ringing in worship. “Especially spiritual. The more we talk about this, the more I think that’s true. The more we talk about what the details are.”

The group also expressed a desire to meet again and check in with each other about their experiences every few months. While I did not set out to change or draw attention to how this process affected the participants, it is worth noting that the exercises of journaling and discussing their involvement increased their awareness of how choir and handbell choir nurtures their spiritual life. This is, perhaps, related to the difficulty and reluctance to speak about spirituality, and the group has shown positive effects from being placed in the position to speak about their spiritual lives. Abigail Johnson suggests that, “while we reflect automatically as we sort and sift through events, more conscious reflection requires us to learn skills and to employ a clear process. Reflection is hard work, and we are not always very good at it. Many people are not able to name feelings or to think clearly about the dynamics of a situation, or to make connections between our story and the biblical story.”148 She encourages group theological reflection as a way to enhance our awareness of God and our relationship with God. There is a place, and even a need, for such a group to be developed at Trinity United Church. It is not practical to spend much time in rehearsal talking about a person’s call or reflecting on their choir ministry as a group. It also may not be the desire for all members. However, a spiritual direction group, not necessarily connected to the music program, or a workshop at a yearly retreat

148 Johnson, 26.
for the choir could serve a need in the congregation or musical group for those who wish to explore their spiritual lives and focus on their ministry.

### 5.5 Outliers, Inconsistencies and Future Work

A person’s narrative and context clearly influence their perception of how being involved in a musical group nurtures their spiritual life. Patricia, John and Karen were in agreement that their music making was closely connected to their spiritual life. Rhonda was not as sure. In her case, her stated purpose for becoming a handbell ringer was that it would be a challenge for her brain and an opportunity to start something new and interesting. As such, she did not regard her music making as changing her relationship with God, because she wasn’t looking for any sort of spiritual connection in her music making. However, there was some change in Rhonda’s perception of the impact of the handbell choir on her spirituality as she reflected over the course of the study. She reflected that she had indeed experienced moments of revelation, expression of emotion and meditation throughout her time in rehearsals and in worship. By the group discussion, she expressed that if she could successfully become immersed and absorbed into the music, an offering to God could follow. From this example, it appears that the musician may not always be consciously aware of the spiritual implications and ramifications of their making music.

There were also some differences in Karen’s story because of her professional relationship with music. Working as a professional, she has a vast amount of experience with musical groups, but not as a volunteer member of a church group. Furthermore, Karen’s expertise and the quantity of music she has made have given her more
opportunities for emotional and spiritual transformation. Her experience as a director gives a different perspective when analyzing how music is nurturing her life and the lives of others.

Karen was much more confident than the other participants when speaking about her own musical abilities. Both Patricia and Rhonda doubt their abilities as musicians. Patricia squirmed in her interview when I refer to her as a musician: “even just to call me a musician. I squirm a little. I don’t think of myself that way.” Rhonda also expressed this sentiment: “I just don’t get to the space where I would see the music as an offering. My music as an offering. For you guys all, it’s fine. No, I think that it’s something in that it’s me making it.” This raises an issue with volunteer choirs and handbell choirs. A person’s perception of their contribution can influence their confidence that they have their own ministry.

There can be no blanket statement that applies to all church musical group participants. Each individual’s personal history, attitude, and faith journey are unique and influence their motivations for and the implications of their choir or handbell choir membership. Attending more sensitively to the many ways in which this is the case can enhance our leadership of music groups. Despite differences in personal context, the ministry of the music program nurtures the spiritual life of each participant in significant—even profound—ways, bringing them ever closer towards harmony with God, each other and the world.

As an early work on the spirituality of church musical groups, this thesis leaves many avenues for exploration in future studies. More work on the spiritual dimensions of the
data, including theological reflection on the transcendent experiences of the sacred, might be valuable to explain what types of spiritual experiences people have when they are making music. It may also be useful to develop methodology and terminology to describe musical engagement and faith. This could be based on other ethnographical approaches.

The study could also be duplicated, for example to compare the results from different types of musical groups, to evaluate its validity in other denominations and contexts, or to study children’s musical groups and spirituality.

5.6 Conclusions

This study has implications for church music programs and can give Music Ministers some insight into providing an environment that nurtures their musicians’ faith lives. Based on the four major themes found in the data, when developing a music program, it is important to consider how we provide opportunities for establishing sacred community, challenge and personal fulfillment, emotional and spiritual absorption with the music and the program’s outreach in the community.

In order to allow the participants to focus in rehearsals and enter fully into the experience, I recommend taking time at the beginning of rehearsal to eliminate distractions and refocus. This can take the form of devotions and/or prayers in addition to warm up time. In my choir we have a devotional book that each week the choir members take turns reading to the rest of the group. This is followed by a physical and vocal warm up. In the handbell choir we have a prayer book and have tried something we call “chat and chew”.
The members take turns bringing chocolate or another treat in a basket. As the basket is passed to each person, they take a treat and also have the opportunity to share something with the group. This can be a joy or a challenge in their lives. After everyone has had a turn with the basket, we pray for those things that have been raised. This process takes 5-7 minutes at the beginning of rehearsal, but it is worth the time. The “chat and chew” gives the participants space to leave their day, connects them with one another in prayer and gives meaning to the rehearsal. It is tempting to skip these refocusing rituals to leave more rehearsal time for music, especially at busy times of the church year. How ironic, for in busy times, we need this space even more! This study reinforces the significance of this time in the life of the musical ensemble and has reminded me of its importance.

Another way that choir and handbell members indicated that they were distracted from entering into worship through music is when they did not relate to the text of the music or the music was poorly written or edited. Careful music selection can help musicians enter into the text and music to provide a meaningful musical experience for both themselves and the congregation. The study group also showed that the frequency that an anthem is repeated is a factor in how well that they know the music and how well they can become absorbed into the music. Previously, I tried not to repeat music very frequently, reusing a piece no sooner than 3 years when the lectionary returned to the same readings, and typically much longer. However, since discovering this information, I am repeating some music (when liturgically appropriate) even a year apart. While challenge and variety are important to the musicians, having some music repeated allows for a more in-depth experience for the musician.
The interviewees also revealed that their own personal sense of mission and ministry works together with the group’s sense of purpose. This is developed through active participation in worship and participation in outreach projects. In my ministry, I have incorporated outreach planning into the work of the choir and handbell executive committees. The committees discuss outreach possibilities and work together with me to carry them out. This more intentional approach gives the ensemble purpose, mission and accomplishment. The groups also develop bonds through social events and contributing to the running of the ensemble. Having the executive committees take care of the social and some of the logistical planning and set up adds to the participant’s sense of purpose and ownership.

Highlighted in my research is the care given between members of the group, particularly in times of crisis. Going forward, I recommend a formal relationship be developed between the choir executive and the pastoral care committee of the church. In addition, due to the significance amount of faith development that occurs in church music groups and the effects of music on health and wellbeing, I recommend an increase in the communication between the Christian Education Division, the Wellness Division and myself. Such discussions could look at how to use music for faith development, physical health and spiritual wellbeing. Trinity also provides Christian education through music. I find the children’s choirs and Vacation Bible Camp effectively promote Bible study and discussion among youth, however, the intentional use of music in Sunday School and for adult study could be improved.

The very process of participating in this study has made my musicians more aware of their purpose and the way music nurtures their spirituality. They speak to each other and
to me about how the music and group membership is affecting them and their lives. It has increased dialogue, energy and purpose in my groups.

It is hoped that this study will begin a dialogue in the church regarding the importance and potential of music ministry, giving ideas for improving choirs and handbell programs and the possible use of music ministry to bolster the church. Churches understand that music programs provide musical leadership and contribute to worship. I would encourage churches to also understand that music programs support the spiritual integrity of the group, and to wrestle with the ramifications for their musicians’ employment. If music nourishes the spirit, then the position and role of the Minister of Music should hold more weight than at times is understood by church councils. My position at Trinity United pays me for 23.75 hours per week while in practice I work 30-40 depending on the season. Perhaps with a change in perspective, churches will develop fairer employment contracts for their musicians, and recognize their ministry in the church, including pastoral care and Christian education, in their job descriptions.
6 Bibliography


7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Rehearsal Reflection

Name:

Date:

Please reflect on one of the following questions as it pertains to your experience as a member of the choir/handbell choir in rehearsal today:

1. How did you feel today before rehearsal? How did you feel after rehearsal?

2. What did you feel or notice while music making today?

3. Did any aspect of the music you were making connect you to God today? If so, how?

4. Describe any significant interpersonal exchanges you had and why they were important

5. Reflect on today’s devotion or prayer time

6. What emotions did you feel today during rehearsal? What was happening at those times?

7. Were there any aspects of today’s rehearsal, including the music or related conversation or direction, which you feel connected with your own faith or spiritual life? If so, what connections were made; or what thoughts did you have?

8. What was missing from your experience today?
7.2 Appendix B: Worship Reflection

Name:

Date:

Please reflect on one of the following questions as they pertain to your experience as a member of the choir/handbell choir in worship today.

1. How did you feel today before worship? How did you feel after worship?

2. What did you feel or notice while music making today?

3. Did any aspect of the music you were leading connect to your experience of worship today? If so, how?

4. Describe any significant interpersonal exchanges you had and why they were important

5. Were you able to experience God in worship today? Why or why not?

6. What emotions did you feel today during worship? What was happening at those times?

7. Were there any aspects of today’s worship service, including the music or related conversation or direction, which you feel connected with your own faith or spiritual life? If so, what connections were made; or what thoughts did you have?

8. What was missing from your experience today?
7.3 Appendix C: Participant Consent Form, Journal Entries

Chancel choir and Jubilate members,

As you may be aware, I am working on a Doctor of Ministry thesis about church music group membership and I am inviting you to participate in my study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to explore your experiences as members of Trinity United Church’s choir and handbell choir and discover how church musical group participation may affect your faith, spiritual life and/or relationship with God. This research will be useful for understanding and building music ministries and will contribute to understanding how music can be an effective tool for spiritual development, mission and church growth. My approved thesis statement is:

This project will examine how an individual’s experience of music in a church music group (choir, handbell choir) at Trinity United Church in Cobourg nurtures the participant’s spiritual life.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any specific question at any time. (There are no “right” or “wrong” answers – all responses are of value and helpful.) You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

**Procedure:** The research involves the following forms of data collection:

1. Journal entries by members of the Chancel Choir and Jubilate over a six week period, to be completed after each rehearsal and worship service in which the group participates. It is hoped that participants write at least three journal entries over the six week period. (This consent form relates to this step in the research procedure.)
2. Interviews with a diverse sample of choir and handbell choir members (between four and six participants chosen to represent a diversity of age, gender and experience). Two interviews will be conducted with each participant. Interviews will be approx. 1 hour in length and one week apart. The interviews will be recorded for purposes of data coding. (Recordings will subsequently be destroyed; all written reference to such date will be anonymous).
3. Interview participants will be asked to participate in a “Community Reflections Group” which will meet to discuss preliminary findings.

**Time Required:** Members participating in journal entries should expect to spend approx. 10-15min per journal entry. Interview participants should expect to spend an additional 2 hours for interviews and 1.5 hours for the Community Reflections Group.
**Risks:** Risks associated with this study may include feeling uncomfortable speaking about personal experiences due to the intimate nature of spirituality and feeling emotional when exploring memories. Should the assignment or interview cause you distress of any kind, please inform me promptly and we can discontinue the process or arrange for pastoral support.

**Benefits:** It is hoped that through this process you will gain a deeper awareness and appreciation of the meaning of your own your participation in choir or the handbell choir.

**Confidentiality/Anonymity:** Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interviews and the only person who listens to the recordings. For the examples and quotes I include in my thesis, I will use pseudonyms (made up names) for all participants, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name.

Recordings and written material will be kept until one year after completion of the degree. They will be stored on an encrypted USB drive, locked in a fire safe box in my home. After the year, they will be destroyed.

All such procedures have been approved in accord with the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board.

**Sharing the Results:** The results and conclusions I draw from this study will be included in my Doctor of Ministry Thesis. The Thesis will be submitted to my Thesis Director and an examination committee, and if successful, it will then be posted on T-Space, a website accessible to University of Toronto students, staff, and other academics.

**Publication:** There is a possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms and/or alter any identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

**Before you sign:** By signing below, you are agreeing to allow any submitted journal entries to be used in this project. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction before signing. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

**Contact Information:**
Deborah Fingas (Student Researcher)
905 377 0834, Debbie.fingas@mail.utoronto.ca

Rev. Dr. William Kervin (Thesis Director)
416-585-4546, w.kervin@utoronto.ca

Office of Research Ethics
416-946-3273, ethics.review@utoronto.ca
Participant’s signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

Please print name: _________________________________

Parent/Guardian signature (if under 18) _________________________________

Please print name: ___________________________ Date: __________

Researcher’s signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

Please print name: _________________________________
7.4 Appendix D: Participant Consent Form: Interviews and Community Reflections Group

Journaling participant,
As you are aware, I am working on a Doctor of Ministry thesis about church music group membership and I am inviting you to continue to participate in my study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to explore your experiences as members of Trinity United Church’s choir and handbell choir and discover how church musical group participation affects your relationship with God. This research will be useful for understanding and building music ministries and will contribute to understanding how music can be an effective tool for spiritual development, mission and church growth. My approved thesis statement is:

*This project will examine how an individual’s experience of music in a church music group (choir, handbell choir) at Trinity United Church in Cobourg nurtures the participant’s spiritual life.*

**Procedure:** The research involves the following:

1. Journal entries by members of the Chancel Choir and Jubilate over a six week period, to be completed after each rehearsal and worship service in which the group participates.
2. Interviews with a diverse sample of choir and handbell choir members (between four and six participants chosen to represent a diversity of age, gender and experience). Two interviews will be conducted with each participant. Interviews will be approx. 1 hour in length and one week apart. The interviews will be recorded.
3. Interview participants will be asked to participate in a “Community Reflections Group” which will meet to discuss preliminary findings.

**Time Required:** Interview participants should expect to spend an 2 hours for interviews and 1.5 hours for the Community Reflections Group.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time, and if you choose, all the information you provided up to that point will be destroyed. However, if you choose to withdraw after the group discussion, data from that discussion will not be destroyed.

**Risks:** There are no known risks associated with this research. However, should the assignment or interview cause you distress, please inform me promptly.

**Benefits:** It is hoped that through this process you will gain an awareness and a sense of purposefulness towards your participation in choir or the handbell choir.
Confidentiality/Anonymity: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interview and the only person who listens to the recordings. For the examples and quotes I include in my thesis, I will use pseudonyms – made up names – for all participants, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name.

Recordings and written material will be kept until one year after completion of the degree. They will be stored on an encrypted USB drive, locked in a fire safe box in my home. After the year, they will be destroyed.

During the community reflections discussion, you will receive confidential information from other participants. You must keep this information confidential and not share it outside of the community reflections group meeting.

Sharing the Results: The results and conclusions I draw from this study will be included in my Doctor of Ministry Thesis. The Thesis will be submitted to my Thesis Director and an examination committee, and if successful, it will then be posted on T-Space, a website accessible to University of Toronto students, staff, and other academics.

Publication: There is a possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

Before you sign: By signing below, you are agreeing to allow any interview responses and community group discussions to be used in this project and to maintain the confidentiality of the other participants. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction before signing. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

Contact Information:
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905 377 0834, Debbie.fingas@mail.utoronto.ca

Rev. Dr. William Kervin (Thesis Director)
416-585-4546, w.kervin@utoronto.ca

Office of Research Ethics
416-946-3273, ethics.review@utoronto.ca

Participant’s signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
Please print name: ________________________________

Researcher’s signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
Please print name: ________________________________
7.5 Appendix E: Interview Questions

Background/General info
How many years have you been part of Trinity United Church?
Were you raised in the church?
How many years in choir/handbell choir?
Did you have any previous musical experience?
Why did you join?
What do you feel is the role of the Chancel choir/handbell choir?
How does the music program contribute to the congregation?
How does the music program contribute to your own spiritual life?

Music and Spirituality
Describe your worship experience as a choir/bell choir member.
How does participating in music make you feel? How do you feel when you sing/ring?
Can you think of an experience you had singing a particular choir anthem that you found particularly meaningful?
What is your favourite hymn and why?
Tell me about a song or tune we have sung/rung that has got stuck in your head.
Does having a song in your head change your actions or thoughts throughout the week?
What factors in making music make it easier for you to connect with God?
Has music affected your relationship with God?

Koinonia
What do you see as your role in the choir/handbell choir?
Describe your relationship with other members of the group
Describe the effect of going to rehearsal on:
  a) you as a musician
  b) your social life
  c) you as a member of the church
What do you consider to be the mission of the church?
  How do you feel the group fulfills the mission of the church?
Can you tell me about a time when has it been important to you to be part of the church choir?
What would you say to someone considering joining a church choir or handbell choir?
# Appendix F: Interviews – Theme Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patricia</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Rhonda</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>Wants a musical challenge</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church safety – haven</td>
<td>Church - steady and comforting (safe)</td>
<td>Church is safe place</td>
<td>Safe and supportive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good people – music makes us better</td>
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<td>environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>people, church makes us better</td>
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<tr>
<td>God – transformation</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choir leadership</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Inspire the congregation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspire faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meditation – clearing</td>
<td>Meditation – congregation</td>
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<td>Mediation – quiet the mind</td>
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<td>away to focus</td>
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<td>In the zone</td>
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<td>Pause button</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music and memory –</td>
<td>History and memories</td>
<td>Music and memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>connection with the past</td>
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<td>Community</td>
<td>Community leads to God</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>When we are in community,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>God is present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of head and into the</td>
<td>Getting inside a piece</td>
<td>Being present</td>
<td>Being present</td>
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<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>Being in the music</td>
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<td>Absorb into music</td>
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<td>Express emotion</td>
<td>Music and emotion</td>
<td>Music and emotion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Whole is greater than the pieces</td>
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<td>Whole is greater than parts</td>
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<td>Sacred community</td>
<td>Church family</td>
<td>Church family</td>
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<td>Self expression and discovery</td>
<td>Self expression</td>
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<td>through writing and improve</td>
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<td>Self expression through music</td>
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<td>Help each other –</td>
<td>Help other people</td>
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<td>teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>John</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning – music</td>
<td>Learning, Learning styles</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Learning styles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Fun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Outreach in community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Support each other</td>
<td>Community of support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmony connects people</td>
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<td>Importance of harmony</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
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<td>Support each other</td>
<td>Community of support</td>
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<td>Support for each other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Message of music</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasize message of service</td>
<td>Highlights theme</td>
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<td>Message in music</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sincere performance</td>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>Intentional – being present</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Belief of performers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Music contributes to worship</td>
<td>Sharing of experience with congregation</td>
<td>Enhances worship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving of one’s time</td>
<td>Contribute to church</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time to pause and reflect</td>
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<td>Some do not see it as a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>contribution to the church</td>
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<td>Friendships</td>
<td>Part of social life</td>
<td>Social life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Waking up – spiritual awareness</td>
<td>Active and engaged in service</td>
<td>Wake up a part of brain</td>
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<td>Performing – heightened experience</td>
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<td>Uncomfortable talking about one’s faith</td>
<td>Offering to God more than</td>
<td>UCC struggle</td>
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<td></td>
<td>one’s faith</td>
<td>congregation</td>
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<td>Self benefitting from ringing</td>
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<td>Not a performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ringing not a gift to God</td>
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<td>Doing something meaningful pleases God</td>
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<td>Wants to sing regularly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Missed music in life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Rhonda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makes feel special</td>
<td>Receive appreciation</td>
<td>Variety of musical activity important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variety of sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of people</td>
<td>Everyone contributes</td>
<td>Get to know people might not otherwise Everyone has something to offer Can do more together than apart</td>
<td>Importance of different people Meet people otherwise wouldn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing and centering (music)</td>
<td>Music accompanies life</td>
<td>Reflect on music and theme throughout week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distraction – bad music or lyrics</td>
<td>Music must suit lyrics</td>
<td>Music illuminates text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Music – joy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bringing joy to others is gift to God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite people in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bringing people into the church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of text/theology</td>
<td>Theological context of service important</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ties to scripture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music program’s reputation in wider community – pride</td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bells are visual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physicality of ringing Beauty in motion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting to know people and integrate into church</td>
<td>More involved in church</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distraction – irritating people Increased confidence over time</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>Distraction and anxiety Increased confidence in self</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Rhonda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group bonding and God</td>
<td>God intends us to do this together Church should draw people together Greater purpose</td>
<td>12 people/one instrument Connection to group Shared purpose</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Easier than finding words</td>
<td></td>
<td>Expressing in different way</td>
<td>Does not affect relationship with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not always an epiphany</td>
<td>Bolsters the church</td>
<td>Attracted to fresh start</td>
<td>Music as puzzle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring directors</td>
<td>Music made experience real and helped illuminate the nature of Jesus</td>
<td>Like doing an activity with the group – accomplish something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do for the congregation what they can’t do for themselves</td>
<td>Singing with others</td>
<td>Music connects to church over history</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Musicality</td>
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<td>Consistency in the eyes of congregation</td>
<td>Loud organ stops</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moves into sacred space</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self conscious/ critical</td>
<td>Music as prayer – open and vulnerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of performances increase revelatory experiences and bonding</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group advantage</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes (number of people with that theme in brackets)

Community and Group
- Pastoral care – community of support (3)
- Church family/sacred community (3)
- Belonging (2)
- Whole is greater than pieces (2)
- Responsibility and commitment (3)
- Community leads to God, when we are in community God is present (4)
- Friendships and social life (3)
- Helping other members of the team (2)
- Variety of people, everyone contributes (4)
- Bonding and God – shared purpose – draw us together (3)

Worship
- Music in the message/theme (3)
- Contribution to worship/enhances worship (3)
- Importance of theology or text (3)
- Leadership of ensemble (2)
- Learning styles (2)

Musical considerations
- Bells are physical/visual (2)
- Challenge and accomplishment (4)
- Harmony connects people/is important (2)
- Learning (4)
- Variety in musical styles and sound important (4)
- Music must suit the lyrics and be of high quality (2)

Meditation and Spirituality
- UCC struggle/uncomfortable talking about faith (2)
- Meditation (3)
- Becoming absorbed into the music (4)
- Music is part of home life (3)
- Joy – music brings joy to others (2)
- Waking up – engaged (3)
- Offering to God or not offering to God (1/2)

Self Expression
- Music and emotion (3)
- Expressing in a different way to words (2)
- Transformation (3)
- Intent and belief of performers/being intentional (3)
- Music and memory (3)
- Fun and excitement (3)
Missed music in life (2)
Anxiety and distractions (3)
Makes feel special and like receiving appreciation (2)

The church
Pride of program/perception from wider community (2)
Church is a safe place, supportive environment (4)
Outreach is important (4)
Invite people in (2)
Participation is/is not a contribution to the church (3)
Helps integrate into other parts of the church (2)

Final Categories and Themes:

Music ensembles and Community
1.1 Support
1.2 Family
1.3 Variety of people
1.4 Bonding and God
1.5 Responsibility
1.6 Community leads to God
1.7 Safe place

Making music
2.1 Challenge
2.2 Harmony
2.3 Variety
2.4 Quality
2.5 Visual

Personal experience of music and spirituality
3.1 Meditation
3.2 Absorbed in music
3.3 Offering to God
3.4 Music and emotion
3.5 Transformation
3.6 Intent
3.7 Memory

Music ensembles in the church and worship
4.1 Outreach
4.2 Music and message
4.3 Leadership
Towards Harmony
Connecting with God through participation in a church music group

A DMin Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the DMin Thesis Proposal Committee
Toronto School of Theology

September 2 2015

By
Deborah Fingas

William Kervin, Thesis Director and College Advisor

Collaborative Learning Group representative

Nancy Lester, Ministry Base Group Representative
Ministry Context

Trinity United Church is a mid-sized, healthy United Church congregation in the town of Cobourg, Ontario. Trinity is the only United Church in a town of approximately 19,000 people. The Cobourg community is described as 70% Christian and 91% white according to the 2011 Census.\textsuperscript{149} The Trinity worshipping community consists of an average of 200 people for Sunday worship. There is a wide age demographic within the congregation--many are retired, but there are also many families with children. The building, finished in its current form in 1901, features domed ceilings, a u-shaped balcony and a stepped chancel at the front of the church.

Trinity is known as being a centre for music in the community, both through its own music programs, as a home for community music groups and as a concert venue. Trinity has had a long history of intentional music ministry. The music is considered crucial to the life, work, worship and mission of this congregation. In addition to the church’s large music program and creative use of music in worship, the church is home to many community organizations including the Northumberland Orchestra and Choir, Shout Sisters Choir and La Jeunesse Youth Choirs. The sanctuary is used for concerts on a regular basis. Trinity understands my position as Minister of Music to be one not just of providing musical leadership, but also using music as an educational and pastoral tool for both children and adults in the congregation.

Weekly worship at Trinity centers around a theme derived from the lectionary readings. Worship tends to be multi-disciplinary and while the liturgical components are consistent from week to week, the service order is flexible. Each week contains at least 3 hymns, congregational responses, a chancel choir anthem and a musical offering from one of the other Trinity ensembles. Effort is made to include a variety of musical styles including classical, world music, gospel, and contemporary Christian utilizing a mixture of organ and piano accompaniment.

As Minister of Music, I have the privilege of working with the ministerial team to plan worship and accompany weekly services. In addition, I am responsible for leading two Children’s choirs, the adult handbell choir and the Chancel Choir in weekly rehearsals, in addition to overseeing the work of the youth handbell choir and a women’s trio (directed by volunteers) and working with other occasional ensembles, instrumentalists and soloists. In total, approximately 85 members of the Trinity United Church congregation attend rehearsals on a weekly basis.

Through my work with these groups, I have observed that members of these church music groups experience a deep connection to the church, God and each other through their participation in the music program. Their commitment to rehearsals, outreach, worship and quality music making are evidence that participating in church life in this way is a deeply meaningful and important part of their lives. Brynjulf Stige says, “Where there is participation ‘in spite of’ there must be a strong ‘in order to.’”150 Anyone who participates in a church music group does so “in spite of” a host of obstacles. They

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participate in spite of transportation issues, the weather, a television special that is on … or more serious obstacles. Throughout my time as a Minister of Music I have had many singers sick with chronic or temporary illnesses and unable to sing—yet still attending rehearsals. I have had drummers and bell ringers with broken arms play one handed and a handbell ringer recovering from a mastectomy come to just sit in rehearsal. Clearly there is something significant about the experience of these musicians that being involved in the group is this important in their lives. I am curious to discover the motivations of these members and how the music program is ministering to them.

In a church’s music ministry, a musical group becomes an integral part of its members’ context; they can collaborate with others while developing their own theology. Making music together becomes part of a person’s life, both spiritually and socially. The musical group becomes a commonality of the Word, and a supportive community, building each member up on his or her individual journey. Part of my project will be to try and determine how and why sacred music is such an effective tool to develop a person’s interpersonal relationships and spirituality.

**Thesis Statement**

This project will examine how an individual’s experience of music and koinonia in a church music group (choir, handbell choir) at Trinity United Church in Cobourg influences the participant’s spiritual life.
Theoretical Framework and Assumptions

The National Congregations Study in the United States in 1998, asked participants, “Does your congregation have any choirs, choruses, or other musical groups that sing or perform on a regular basis?” and found that 86.3% of congregations reported having a musical group as part of their worship services. The study also found that 59.6% of churches report the number of musical groups to be between 1 and 4. These statistics show the current prevalence of church music groups in churches. I believe that the popularity of musical groups in churches has as much to do with their impact on the participant musicians as it has to do with the style of worship or impact on the congregation.

As the Minister of Music at a United Church, much of my effort is focused on the preparation, rehearsal, pastoral care and performance of Trinity’s musical groups. Each of these groups contributes to Sunday worship and outreach opportunities in the community, making the participants of the ensembles music ministers themselves, offering their gifts and time to enrich the worship experience of others. Participation in the musical group is absolutely one of service and leadership. Contributing to the life of the church in this way surely enhances a musician’s sense of self-worth and purpose; however, existing literature does not explore how ministering to others connects a musician to God. In this study, I am interested in the effects not on the effectiveness of a choir on the worship service, or the spiritual experience of the congregation when the choir sings, but in how

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music making allows musical group members to connect with God and how being a part of a group helps foster their faith.

Although it is generally assumed that musical group membership has some sort of positive affects on the participants, there has been little research into how church music groups are used as a means of ministry. In 2009, Chorus America performed an impact study to determine the effects of choir membership on the choir members. Many different types of choirs were studied, including 38% of the surveyed group, who belonged to church choirs. The study found that for adults, characteristics of choir members included being avid supporters or the arts, a high level of volunteerism, a high level of engagement in civic activities and good members of a team.\(^{152}\) This study, while important, does not point towards the cause of these attributes – why are choir members good members of a team? It also leads to questions like “does music itself impact these attributes or would the results be similar if another non-musical group was surveyed?” Most importantly, in my context, missing from this survey is information about how choir membership affects the participant’s faith life. I have been unable to find any studies that address this issue.

The approach taken for this thesis will use existing theory from two key areas. First, the study of music and its effect on people (music and emotion, memory and spirituality), and second, the study of secular musical group membership (music therapy and education theory). This research will then be combined with the theological frameworks of koinonia and sacramentality and looked at through the lens of my

theology of ministry. By connecting these fields of study, I hope to develop theory that helps us to understand how the experience of music and koinonia influences an individual’s faith life.

Music and Spirituality

George A Lane in his book *Christian Spirituality* defines spirituality as “any particular style of approach to union with God.”153 This broad definition encompasses both institutional religion (the church) and an individual’s seeking of the divine outside of the institutional church (walking in the woods, meditation etc.). Music is used as a tool that connects people with their spirituality, or to quote Don Saliers, “music is the language of the soul made audible.”154 The connection between music and the soul has been common thought for centuries. Anicius M. Boethius (c 480-524) in his book *De Institutione Musica* (Fundamentals of Music), classified music into three types, one of which was *musica humana* or music of the human soul.155 As an interpretive stance for my thesis work, I will consider music as a medium that touches our emotions and through personal expression of those emotions allows for transformation and encounter with God.

Music is associated with the divine in most world religions. Hindu temples use bells to call worshippers to worship. In Judaism, the shofar is used in a similar manner,


154 Don Saliers and Emily Saliers, *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 35.

and Buddhists use singing bowls to call on the divine presence.\(^{156}\) Likewise, Christians use music for awakening, eliciting and sustaining states of consciousness in worship in addition to using music for teaching, praying and confessing one’s own faith. Using music for worship in these ways may indicate that we are using music to call for God. We want God to hear our music and make God’s presence known to us. However, Noirín Ní Riain in her article *The Sound of God* proposes the opposite. “Man does not search out God, but rather the reverse is true. Sound is a real link to one’s divine and human essence and to the yearning to be oneself. Only by such becoming can we be more unified and thus participate in the two-way dialogue in freedom, which God generously offers.”\(^{157}\) Through music, we search for ourselves, and in finding ourselves, become more open to God’s presence.

One of the key links between music and spirituality is emotion. In particular, emotional reactions to music can been seen when the music connects to a person’s history. As illustrated in Patrik Juslin and John Sloboda’s book “Music and Emotion,”

> “Some sort of emotional experience is probably the main reason behind most people’s engagement with music.”\(^{158}\) On many occasions, a congregation member will comment after the service how a particular anthem stirred up emotions for them, bringing them to tears, bringing forth memories of the past, and giving them insight into their


lives. In my study, I will look for the spiritual connections that surround a person’s emotional response to music.

Sacramentality

The theological construct that best describes the connection between music and spirituality is sacramentality. The United Church of Canada defines a sacrament as “a symbolic action, or ritual, by which people of faith encounter the presence and goodness of God. In a sacrament, ordinary things like water, bread, and wine are used to point us to God and God’s love, reminding us of the sacred in life.”

Although the United Church names only Baptism and Communion as official sacraments initiated by Jesus, other acts of worship could certainly be considered sacramental in nature. Participation in music, whether in listening or creating, can be considered sacramental. Here, ordinary breath, bodies, and instruments are used to direct our attention towards God and allow people to experience God during the musical experience. Richard Viladesau agrees, “To the extent that it attempts to give (always provisional and inadequate) form to the transcendental mystery, religious art may be described as being sacramental – in a general sense, referring to those acts by which the church expresses and realizes itself, in which it gives concrete form to its essence as the historical presence of God’s self-gift in Christ.”

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“Music does not produce objects; it transforms subjects.”¹⁶¹ In worship, the Holy Spirit certainly works through music. “The Spirit is the present active person of the Trinity, bringing people to faith, and to worship, and into Christian service.”¹⁶² As we participate in and encounter God through music, the Holy Spirit uses our memories, personal references, and experiences to bring us to new realizations. As a result our lives, attitudes and actions are changed. “The Spirit blows where it will and reshapes the lives of those encountered. This is the kind of spiritual transformation that leads people to imitate Christ and to participate in the life of God.”¹⁶³

Transformation also occurs after the worship service is over. When a person meets God in worship, that person is then changed. If we acknowledge that music can be a means of sacramental encounter with God, we also understand that music making in worship transforms us. Lonergan’s theory of “intentional consciousness” decomposes the human capacity of knowing into four stages: empirical, intellectual, rational and responsible.¹⁶⁴ “In the first we experience, in the second we seek to understand what it is we experience, in the third we reflect on what has been understood to verify its truth and reality, and finally we decide on its value, and on what we are going to do with it.”¹⁶⁵ Applying Lonergan’s theory of knowing to music, we first empirically experience the


¹⁶³ Schmit, 37.

¹⁶⁴ Heaney, 150.

¹⁶⁵ Heaney, 150.
confluence of music, sound and spiritual connection. Second, intellectually, we remember what has happened. In our spiritual lives, music allows us to carry sacred texts and theology with us throughout the week. Third, rationally, we reflect on the memory – asking ourselves “why does this matter?” and “how does this experience change what I am doing?” Lastly, responsibly, we make a decision to faithfully live out our experiences. In my study, I can use Lonergan’s theory and the idea of music as sacrament to guide the formulation of my study questions. The answers and specific examples uncovered through the study will hopefully provide insight into the applicability of these theological ideas to music ministry.

Music and Bonding

Musical participation is a particularly good tool for bonding. *Valuing Musical Participation* describes case studies performed to determine the effects of music making through individual and group participation in Gilbert and Sullivan societies. It was found that “making music with others was shown to affirm a sense of belonging and like-minded endeavor, so sustaining commitment and offering a shared experience that fostered memories and friendships among a diverse group of people.”\(^{166}\) In addition to simply having common interests, the nature of creating music itself may have a physiological effect on the participants. “Gage Averill suggests that the physical vibrations of closely harmonized singing create a close personal and musical connection amongst participants: ‘the relationship of the internalizing and externalizing of the self’

\(^{166}\) Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation*, (University of Sheffield: Ashgate, 2005), 53.
and of others in collective musical encounters encourages the production of a powerful, greater sense of solidarity and unity’. “\(^{167}\)

Music therapy places greater emphasis on the music making process than on the final musical product. “In music therapy there is an interest in human interaction through music and not just in the organism’s reaction to music. Music therapy practice therefore often focuses upon human expression and communication.”\(^{168}\) Gary Ansdell completed a case study on an initiative in East London that provides training and social opportunities for adults experiencing mental health problems. The group “Musical Minds” of approximately 8 members meets weekly to “make and share music together with opportunities for solo and group activity. The group aims to prepare for and organize regular performances as well as musical fellowship.”\(^{169}\) Over time, the rehearsal process has changed the group. The director Sarah states that when she “first came to the group people would simply want to do their own thing (‘be a soloist’), could hardly listen to each other, and then would argue about not respecting each other, or being unable to practically coordinate the concerts they want to do together.”\(^{170}\) “Gradually there has been more collaboration – both musically and socially.”

This research, although secular, strongly suggests the value of church music groups for pastoral care and unity of the church. Within the study I would like to be able to distinguish what is different between a secular and a sacred group.

\(^{167}\) Pitts, 63

\(^{168}\) Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 3.

\(^{169}\) Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 34.

\(^{170}\) Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic, 36.
Koinonia

The church, and more specifically, small groups in a church, can connect people as a community. According to Barth’s theology, relationship is at the root of God’s purpose. “In Himself [God] does not will to exist for Himself, to exist alone. On the contrary, He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and therefore alive in His unique being with and for and in another…. He does not exist in solitude but in fellowship.”\footnote{171} Koinonia is literally translated as “fellowship,” however, koinonia is more than simply a kindred social relationship. Many sources define koinonia as “an intimate bond of sharing that is established by participation in a shared reality.”\footnote{172} In addition, George Hunsinger suggests that koinonia includes “mutual indwelling,” “participation,” “coniherence” and “coexistence.”\footnote{173}

Theresa Latini explains that there are five interlocking relationships that make up koinonia. This multi-dimensional koinonia is mediated by the Holy Spirit.

6. The koinonia of the Trinity.
   The Trinity is three unique individuals, in full relationship with one another.
7. The koinonia of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.
   Jesus is fully human and fully divine.
8. The koinonia between Christ and the church.
   Through Jesus’ ministry, God creates a bond between God and people.
9. The koinonia among church members.
   Through Christ, Christians are joined to one another and the entire communion of saints.
10. The koinonia between the church and the world\footnote{174}


\footnote{173} Latini, 76.

\footnote{174} Latini, 77.
The church exists to serve the world, who, being human, are connected to God.

In direct contrast to contemporary society’s individualization and isolation, koinonia is about relationship. Each individual has a unique spiritual journey, however, as Latini states, one is not a Christian in isolation.  

Anna Martin, in her book *Rooted in the Divine* agrees, “Personal faith journeys are just that, personal faith journeys. Paradoxically, personal faith journeys are never carried out alone. Whether we recognize it or not, we are always journeying with God. ‘We are not alone, we live in God’s world’. God is ever-present. We are also always journeying with others. We make our way through life in community.” This speaks to both the koinonia between Christ and the church (God is ever-present) and the koinonia among church members (journeying with others). As members of world and church, we live out our faith in the world, exhibiting the koinonia between the church (as members, not as an institution) and the world.

In my study, the language of koinonia seems particularly well suited as a theologically-informed way of discussing how an individual’s experience in a church music group influences the participant’s spiritual life.

**Assumptions**

1. Music can help people to connect to God. If participating in music through listening or making music is a means to encounter God, then it follows that the act of musical engagement can be seen

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175 Latini, 83.

as sacramental. Participation in a church choir or handbell choir gives the musician opportunities in both rehearsal and worship to encounter God.

2. Koinonia exists in church music groups.

Music programs provide an opportunity for small group ministry in the church. Significantly, musical groups are, by their very nature, based in relationship, making them ideal for the development of koinonia. Choirs, handbell choirs and other musical ensembles can therefore assist in the unfolding koinonia between God and the church, between church members and between the church and the world.

3. Music ministry has a purpose, and its effectiveness can be evaluated through the lens of a theology of ministry. In my view, music ministry should:
   • Allow for a sacramental encounter with God
   • Be transformational through the Holy Spirit
   • Create Unity
   • Allow for personal expression
   • Proclaim the Gospel
   • Be Pastoral

**Action in Ministry**

The project will take the form of a phenomenological study according to John Creswell in his book *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Creswell describes a phenomenological study as looking to describe the essence of an experience, grounding a
theory in the view of the participants\textsuperscript{177}, which describes my project perfectly. As such, I will be focusing on discovering how an individual’s experience of music and koinonia in a church music group influences the participant’s spiritual life. Each of my participants will share the same phenomenon of church musical group participation and the study will look to illuminate what people experience spiritually through their involvement. I am expecting to see that both the act of music making, group involvement and desire to work towards the mission of the church will be key motivating factors in participation and in developing a relationship with God. I am hoping to hear stories and examples of how church music groups can minister to their members.

In order to obtain this information, I will be using journal entries and in-depth interviews to collect recent and then pivotal experiences in a person’s experience in choir or handbell choir. The feedback group will use the data gained from the first two methods to validate the data and offer new memories and thoughts that may be illuminated in a group discussion.

In each of my collection methods, care will be taken to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The participants’ names will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interviews and the only person who listens to the recordings. For the examples and quotes I include in my thesis, I will use pseudonyms for all participants, unless they specify in writing that they wish to be identified by name.

Recordings will be made for the interviews and community reflection. Recordings will be digital and will be immediately transferred to safe storage on an encrypted USB

key and deleted from the recording device. Recordings and written material will be kept until one year after completion of the degree. Digital files will be stored on an encrypted USB drive. Both the USB key and the paper files (journal entries) will be locked in a fire safe box in my home. After the year, they will be destroyed.

**Journal**

A letter of explanation and consent will be handed out to each member of my choir and handbell choir (Appendix 5). Each member will be given the opportunity to journal after a rehearsal or worship service that they have participated in over a 6 week span. The journal entries will be responses to a set of questions or prompts as seen in Appendix 1 and 2. The hope is that writing about recent events will produce specific examples about how making music in a church group affects their lives. This will also introduce the participants to thinking about the relationship between church music group participation and spirituality. This opportunity will be open to any member of the Trinity United Chancel Choir or Jubilate Handbell Choir who wishes to participate. Because the Chancel Choir has members that are under the age of 18, permission must be granted from the parent/guardian in addition to the singer.

**In depth interviews**

I will select 4-6 members of my choir and handbell choir to participate in 2 interviews, one week apart, each of about an hour in length. The selection of participants will be from a diverse sample of age, gender and length of group membership and may be influenced by journal submissions. No participants younger than 18 will be selected.
Each participant requested will receive a letter of consent as seen in Appendix 6. I will conduct the interviews one on one in my church office.

The questions for the initial interview can be found in Appendix 3. The in-depth interviews provide opportunity for long-term stories to emerge. The journaling provides specific examples over a snapshot in time, whereas the interviews allow for formative or past experiences to be explored.

After the initial interview, the interview will be transcribed by myself and notes will be made to guide the second interview. The second interview allows for clarification and questions from points made in the first interview and allows for the interviewee to think in the week between interviews. Questions for the second interview will be created upon reflection of the first interview.

**Community Reflections**

After analyzing the data from the journals and interviews, I will convene a community reflection meeting. To kick off this meeting, I will present some of my initial thoughts and findings to the group of people that I interviewed. The group will then give feedback and discuss the ideas presented. This will serve to validate the data and provide new insights when the people discuss the concepts with one another. A brief outline can be seen in Appendix 4. The session will also be recorded.
Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed according to Tim Sensing’s description of coding in his book *Qualitative Research.* The process will start with open coding, identifying the main ideas presented in the data and then axial coding will be used to categorize the open codes into a more manageable number and identify key themes.

Journals

1. Collect journal entries
2. Read data to get a sense of themes or main ideas
3. Type data into a Word document. Identify each entry with a number (Person number – week number – R for rehearsal or W for worship)
4. Open code journal entries - writing codes beside the text in a column
5. Use axial coding to group open codes into larger themes
6. Create a list of axial codes created and reorganize data under each code

Interviews

1. Make transcripts from audio recordings from interviews
2. Re-read data
3. Open code interviews – writing codes beside the text in a column
4. Identify statements by (Person number – interview number – minute on audio tape – page in transcript)
5. Use axial coding to group open codes into larger themes

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6. Create a list of axial codes created and reorganize data under each code

At this point I will compare the axial coding in the journals and interviews and group into one final level of coding.

Community Reflections
1. Present code findings to the group
2. Create a transcript from the audio recording of the group discussion
3. Code the data according to the axial themes (second level)
4. Pay close attention to slippage and silences (identify other themes)

Final Analysis
1. Alter (if necessary) codes established after the journal/interview analysis
2. Present data in conversation with theory as outlined in literary review.

Risks and Limitations
In order for a person to spiritually experience or encounter God through music making, they must be both fully engaged in the task and also open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. A vocalist, as Gordon Adnams says, must be “really worshipping, not just singing.”

Adnams explains that sometimes people can be singing, but not conscious of the text or its meaning. “Singing in this state is not mindless; however, the singers are

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not minding their singing.” By being intentional about making music, mindful of the text (if any), and being focused on God, we see that “the sacramental quality of its music will always have much to do with the spirit in which it is offered.” It is hoped that in this study that members of my musical groups are entering into church musical group membership with an openness and intentionality to encounter God. Other motivations for participation may fail to show how music and koinonia connect the person to God, but would tell a different story about church musical groups.

This study is also limited by the ability of the participants to articulate their faith, experiences and spirituality. Because people at Trinity United Church do not often speak openly about their faith life, participants may have difficulty finding the words to articulate how their experiences have influenced their connection to God. It is hoped that through the exercise of journaling and the opportunity for a second interview, participants will be able to discuss the spiritual aspects of their experiences.

A study of this size will only generate experiences from a few lives that have been influenced by their participation in church musical groups. This study will also only take place in one congregation of one denomination. Other church contexts may have a different experience for choir and handbell choir members. These differences can be due to geographical, demographical, economic, philosophical, cultural and theological differences of the church community, to name a few. In addition, the ministerial staff and director of the ensembles (including the Minister of Music) may provide a different experience for the participants.

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180 Adnams, 187.

There are no known risks for an individual to participate in this study. It is possible that selection of the interview candidates could cause division in the group due to jealousy. To address this, I will introduce the project during a choir rehearsal and explain that I cannot interview everyone, so a selection must be made. The decision of who to interview will be made to create a diverse sample of age, experience and gender and that the selection does not imply favouritism or indicate the quality of the journal entries.

**Contributions**

There has been very little research into the effects of music ministry in the lives of members of church choirs and handbell choirs. This is surprising since the majority of churches have some sort of choir meeting for rehearsals and participating in worship. Studying the benefits of musical group membership could give insight into the spiritual needs that are being filled by this kind of participation and how these groups are fulfilling the mission of the church. In turn, practical applications in developing music ministries that purposefully influence the spiritual needs of the participant in addition to the needs of the worshiping congregation may be discovered. It is hoped to find real world examples of the power of music to connect people to both each other and to God. Knowledge regarding the experience of koinonia is also likely to cross over into other non-musical small group ministries in the church.
7.8 Appendix H: Ethics Approval Letter

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 32288

November 18, 2015

Dr. William Kervin
EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Deborah A Fingas
EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Dear Dr. Kervin and Deborah A Fingas,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “Towards harmony: Connecting with God through participation in a church music group”

ETHICS APPROVAL

| Original Approval Date: November 18, 2015 |
| Expiry Date: November 17, 2016 |
| Continuing Review Level: 1 |

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Brower, Ph.D.
REB Co-Chair

Jeffrey Steele, Ph.D.
REB Co-Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager