A Theology of Power in Shared Leadership Teams

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Abstract

Shared leadership is an emerging leadership practice for many congregations. Yet its practice in Christian congregations remains understudied and undertheorized. This essay argues that shared leadership is a practice that corresponds to and facilitates the community's increased participation in the trinitarian life of God through the practice of mutual influence, collective agency, fluid expertise, and growth-in-connection. Thus, shared leadership is a theologically faithful practice for congregations that are seeking new ways of structuring their life together in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Wesleyan Community Church (WCC) was a predominantly white, middle-class congregation of three hundred with a history of schism.[1] In the 1990s, WCC was planted after a contentious split from another church, and the new congregation never figured out how to work well together. Building a church facility had kept them occupied for a while, but now they were five years into an unaffordable mortgage and were not growing at the pace required to fulfill their financial obligations. Out of desperation, they called Eric, a young pastor, full of potential, in hopes that he would be able to bring increased growth to the congregation. Over the next two years, Eric practiced shared leadership with the youth and children's pastors and empowered church members to help lead various ministries. Young families began attending, bringing their enthusiasm into the community. A certain buzz filled the air on

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[1] This case study is based upon a real congregation. All names and identifiers have been changed.

Sundays. Yet some members resisted these changes. They could feel their power slipping away as power became more dispersed throughout the congregation. With a balloon payment on their mortgage looming, the tension in this congregation was rising. Eric knew that they had to undergo drastic adaptive change if WCC was to survive.[2] They needed to become a people who used power as their crucified Christ had. How might Eric help this congregation take the next faithful step?

This scenario is all too common as many congregations in North America are facing dwindling numbers and finances. The experience of loss has forced numerous congregations to change or face the possibility of closing their doors permanently. Change efforts often fail because of power struggles.[3] Many scholars have reimagined what power looks like in the kingdom of God, but this has yet to impact how many congregations structure their life together. Instead, most current pastoral paradigms follow a monarchical model that places the pastor at the center of power and facilitates conditions where power and authority can be misused and abused.[4] Congregations need leadership tools that are theologically faithful and facilitate a more cruciform use of power.[5]

Shared leadership has emerged as a viable leadership practice for many congregations. Shared leadership is a dynamic influence process among persons-in-relation in teams such that leadership roles and influence are distributed among team members to

[2] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1994).
[3] John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," *Harvard Business Review* 85(1) (January 2007): 96–103; John P. Kotter and Leonard A. Schlesinger, "Choosing Strategies for Change," *Harvard Business Review* 86(7/8) (August 2008): 130–39.
[4] See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), 17.
[5] Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009).

accomplish a shared goal.[6] There are four characteristics that shared leadership teams in congregations exhibit to varying degrees. First, team members mutually influence each other to accomplish their shared goals.[7] Second, teams exercise collective agency and take responsibility for decisions as a team.[8] Third, teams practice fluid expertise, moving around the role of primary influencer, depending upon the situation and skill sets within the team.[9] Finally, participants are committed to the growth-in-connection of other team members, recognizing that holiness is something best sought together.[10] Shared leadership teams might be co-pastors sharing the role of lead pastor, pastoral teams who may or may not have more traditional primary spheres of influence, lay-clergy hybrid teams, or entirely lay-led congregations. Although team structures vary widely, these four characteristics are present at different levels in every shared leadership team.

Several sociological trends in the United States over the past fifty years have allowed shared leadership to emerge more frequently and make it a contextually appropriate practice.[11] The first of these interrelated trends is a rising democratization of society and the church with an increased expectation that people will participate in decision-making processes. Coupled with this is a second trend—a democratization of knowledge characterized by a decreased role for the expert, a growing sense that people's perceptions are relative, and

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[6] Cf. Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, "All Those Years Ago," in Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership, eds. Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003), 1; Jinlong Zhu et al., "Shared Leadership: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Research Agenda," Journal of Organizational Behavior 39 (2018): 836.

[7] Pearce and Conger, "All Those Years Ago," 8–9.

[8] David L. Bradford and Allan R. Cohen, *Power Up: Transforming Organizations Through Shared Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), 25ff.

[9] Joyce K. Fletcher and Katrin Käufer, "Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility," in *Shared Leadership*, 29.

[10] Fletcher and Kaüfer, 27ff.

[11] Cf. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 13; Lee Beach and Andrew Rutledge, "Flat World, Flat Leadership: The Philosophical and Theological Ideals That Inform a Paradigm for Twenty-First Century Leadership," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 18(1) (Spring 2019): 5–24.

an explosion of internet-based platforms that allow anybody with an internet connection to share their opinion. The third trend is an emerging relational anthropology. Social scientists are increasingly describing how a person is socially embedded, develops an identity in relationship with others, and flourishes most when surrounded by a strong community.[12] Fourth, financial difficulties plague many congregations. With the rise of the "nones" (those who are religiously unaffiliated),[13] shrinking churches,[14] and aging clergy,[15] many congregations are struggling to pay a full-time pastor.[16] Increasingly, congregations are relying upon creative leadership structures that do not rely upon a full-time ordained pastor. The final trend is an increase of knowledge workers. The last several decades have seen a steady decrease in manufacturing positions and a steady increase in the services industry, particularly health care and social assistance.[17] Many congregations have seen shared leadership as a contextually appropriate response to these trends because of the way it allows for increased participation, fosters community, offers a financially viable solution, and aligns with the experiences of the increasing number of knowledge workers.

Before we return to Wesleyan Community Church and how power is manifested in shared leadership, this essay will develop an

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[12] See Nancy Ammerman, "Religious Identities and Religious Institutions," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion,* ed. Michele Dillon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 207–224; Darren E. Sherkat, "Religious Socialization: Sources of Influence and Influences of Agency, in Dillon, *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, 151–163; Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, *Relational "(e) Pistemologies"* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

[13] Pew Research Center: Religious and Public Life Forum, "'Nones' on the Rise," October 9, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/ (accessed August 19, 2019).

[14] Pew Research Center: Religious and Public Life Forum, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/ (accessed August 19, 2019).

[15] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 71–78.

[16] Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe* (New York: Oxford University, 1997).

[17] Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Largest Industries by State: 1990–2013," The Economics Daily (U.S. Department of Labor, July 28, 2014), https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2014/ted_20140728.htm (accessed August 19, 2019).

ecclesiology that is rooted in our participation in the triune God. I will consider Jürgen Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity and place the perichoretic life of God as our orienting concern.[18] Next, from Robert Muthiah I will borrow six ways that communities of faith can correspond to the life of God. Then, I will describe how shared leadership embodies these guidelines and faithfully corresponds to the life of God. Finally, I will return to WCC to illustrate the realities of power and how it might be used faithfully. Throughout, I will argue that as we participate in the perichoretic life of God, our life together should correspond to and facilitate the community's increased participation in the life of God. Shared leadership is a practice that does this through the mutual influence of team members, collective agency exercised by the team, the practice of fluid expertise, and the growth-in-connection that occurs. Thus, shared leadership is a theologically faithful practice for congregations that are seeking new ways of structuring their life together.

Jürgen Moltmann's Social Doctrine of the Trinity

In The Trinity and the Kingdom, German theologian Jürgen Moltmann begins with God as three, arguing that beginning with God as one—as Western theologians have historically done—consistently leads to either Arianism or Sabellianism (129–150).[19] Instead of beginning with the Father, Moltmann begins with "the history of Jesus, the Son, for he is the revealer of the Trinity" (65). The most important title of Jesus is Son because it is as the Son of the Father that the Son is eternally begotten. It is the Son who is the Incarnate One because the Son "is the Logos through whom the Father creates his world" and "that image of God for which God destines human beings" (117, italics original). The Son alone can invite humanity into his sonship so that all might be children of God and participate in the life of God. Moltmann places the cross at the center of the Trinity: "Before the world was, the sacrifice

[18] I am borrowing the term *orienting concern* from Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 18.
[19] In-text citations in this section refer to Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God,* trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993).

was already in God. No Trinity is conceivable without the Lamb, without the sacrifice of love, without the crucified Son. For he is the slaughtered Lamb glorified in eternity" (83). This is the act of the Trinity that provides the fullest revelation of God's essence and the orienting lens through which we must view the history of God.

Next, Moltmann considers the one without origin, the Father of the Son, who eternally begets the Son and eternally breathes out the Spirit. For this reason, it is not the first statement about God in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that provides the essence of the Father's nature—"Father almighty"—but rather the second one—"begotten from the Father before all ages."[20] The Father is indeed the maker of heaven and earth, but it is out of the Father's love for the Son and in the power of the Spirit that the Father creates. Consequently, we can understand love as the essence of the Father, for in love the Father eternally begets the Son and eternally breathes forth the Spirit. And it is in the overflowing love of the Father, Son, and Spirit that the universe is created.

While much of Trinity focuses on the Son and the Father of the Son, the Holy Spirit is just as vital to Moltmann's theology. For Moltmann, "The Holy Spirit is therefore the link in the separation. He is the link joining the bond between the Father and the Son, with their separation" (82). The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father simultaneously to the Son being eternally begotten by the Father (187). While Moltmann recognizes the ambiguity in the biblical narrative as well as Christian tradition concerning whether the Spirit is a person or an energy, Moltmann insists that we must understand the Spirit as a person with agency. Language is used about the Father or the Son acting through the Spirit, which describes Spirit as energy (114). However, the Spirit also is a subject; as the "glorifying God" and "the unifying God.… The Spirit… is a subject from whose activity the Son and the Father receive their glory and their union" (126). In salvation history, the Spirit's role is vital as the one through whom we become brothers and sisters of the Son and participate in the life of God. It is in the

[20] "Nicene Creed Greek Text with English Translation," earlychurchtexts.com/public/nicene_creed.htm (accessed March 19, 2019).

power of the Spirit that we are caught up in the divine life of God and are "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).[21]

While Moltmann starts with the Trinity, he still accentuates the oneness of God. Their unity, however, is not found in their shared substance but in their "perichoretic at-oneness":

> By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, that they are one. It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy. Precisely through the personal characteristics that distinguish them from one another, the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in one another and communicate eternal life to one another. In the perichoresis, the very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together. (157)

Consequently, while God cannot be reduced to one, God also cannot be reduced to three. Understanding God as perichoretic avoids both of these heresies by describing how God's one-ness is possible only because of God's three-ness.[22]

Focusing on the Trinity allows Moltmann the opportunity to reframe the core of God's essence. Instead of insisting on God's immutability and apathy, as many theologians do, Moltmann uses the experience of the Son's utter forsakenness on the cross as the starting point for his theology. On the cross, we see the Son in agony because of his godforsakenness, a Father who is heartbroken at the death of the Son, and the Spirit who is in anguish as God abandons God. The moment of God's fullest revelation of God's essence has the pathos of God at its core. For Moltmann, it is only by focusing on the Trinity that we are able to grasp this truth, for God can only be love if God can suffer. Consequently, if we are to affirm that God is love, then we must start with the triune God.

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[21] All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

[22] See Verna Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 53–65; G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952).

God's love and pathos guide Moltmann's understanding of salvation as well. For Moltmann, the Trinity's love is so great that it spills over into God's creation, becoming "free and creative.… Creation is a part of the eternal love affair between the Father and the Son…. Creation exists because the eternal love communicates himself creatively to his Other. It exists because the eternal love seeks fellowship and desires response in freedom" (58–59). This love affair continues past the initial point of creation and leads to the Son's godforsakenness so that nobody else would ever have to experience what it means to be forsaken by God. Because of God's love, God is open to the world; because of the cross and resurrection, the Spirit pulls us into participation in the very life of God and grants us fellowship with God.

Coupled with Moltmann's soteriology is a robust eschatology. In order to make space for creation, God had to "concede to his creation the space in which it can exist" (59). Creation was granted freedom in this space to respond to God's love. In the eschaton, when God becomes all in all, humanity will be truly free in its "unhindered participation in the eternal life of the triune God" (222). This is the telos of all creation, the reason that God made the universe. God's ecstatic love longs for that love to be returned. In the eschaton, all of creation will be caught up in "the eternal perichoresis of their love" (177). In this manner, the perichoretic life of the Trinity provides the pattern for the future of the cosmos and the telos for our understanding of salvation.

This brief introduction to Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity has provided a trinitarian foundation upon which to move forward in constructing an ecclesiology. Starting with God's triunity allows us to see how the assertions in 1 John 4 that God is love are possible. God is love because in God's own life, the Father's love for the Son and Spirit, and the Spirit's love for the Father and Son, and the Son's love for the Father and Spirit are at the core of Godself. Out of this overflowing love, the triune God acts perichoretically to create an other who can receive God's love and who can return to participate in God's perichoretic life. The next

section will describe the role that the people who are in Christ play in God's mission of extending the perichoretic fellowship of the triune God to all of creation.

Participation in the Life of God Through Our Baptism

Repeatedly the New Testament uses the phrase "in Christ" to describe Christians. In Romans 6:3, Paul tells us we are "baptized into Christ Jesus." In Galatians 3:28, he reminds his readers that they are "one in Christ Jesus." Again, in 1 Corinthians 1:9, he reminds his readers that they were "called into the fellowship of his Son." This common Pauline phrase explains what it means to participate in Jesus' death and resurrection—we are dead to ourselves and the old way of living in sin and have been "united with [Christ]" in his resurrection (Romans 6:5).

Participation in Christ does not end with the Son. As we are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19), we are baptized into the life of the triune God.[23] The Gospel of John affirms this when Jesus prays that just as he is in the Father and the Father in him, his disciples would be "in us" (John 17:21), as well as by the author of 1 John who reminds readers that "our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The Gospel of John also ties baptism of water and of the Spirit together, making it difficult to speak of one without the other (John 3:1–9; cf. Acts 1:5). Consequently, we can say that when we participate in Christ, we participate in the triune God.

Being in Christ is not a static state of being but an eschatological reality that pulls us forward toward increased participation in the life of God. We are already in Christ but are not yet full participants in the life of God. Until that day when the redemption of God is fulfilled, we cannot wholeheartedly participate in the life of the Trinity. Even though we have died to sin and been raised into new life, we continually fall short of God's perfect love. Sin pervades every aspect of our lives, including our relationships and ecclesial structures. All too often, we think we are acting out of love but are only acting

[23] This paragraph draws upon Volf, *After Our Likeness,* 194ff. See also Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 217–21.

out of self-protection. Even the very social structures within which we live are steeped in sinful realities that promote racism, classism, and sexism.[24] History has repeatedly shown that the church can never assume it has arrived but must continually be repenting of its sinfulness and submitting to the Spirit's transformative grace. In the words of Paul in Romans 6:1–2, "should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!"

Instead, because we have been "baptized into his death," we can "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4). We can trust that the Spirit is continually transforming us (2 Cor. 3:18). God's work in our lives and communities is not yet complete. However, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). To become full participants in the perichoretic life of God is the entire telos of the universe, the reason that God created us. Indeed, this is the missio dei—God pulling all of creation into God's self so that God will be all in all. Until that day, we are already participating in the life of God even as we have not yet experienced God's full salvific vision. We can, by the power of the Spirit, feebly attempt to do life together in ways that correspond to the life of God even as we will always fall short.[25]

Because we participate in Christ, we structure our life together in ways that correspond to the life of God.[26] This is not simply modeling our life after the Trinity; rather it is a recognition that we are called to do life together in ways that live into the eschaton of full participation in the life of God. Thus, if God is perichoretic, then our life together should be characterized by perichoresis; if God is love, then our life together should be characterized by love. This roots our ecclesiology in the life of the triune God, influencing

[24] For a number of essays illustrating this reality written by womanist theologians, see *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering,* ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).
[25] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 285. Volf, 199.
[26] See Volf, 191–200; Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community,* 278–79.

not only the ways that we interact with each other but also the ways that we build church structures.

With this telos at the forefront, we can consider ways in which the church might correspond to the Triune God. Practical theologian Robert Muthiah considers six compelling ways that the church should correspond to the Trinity: relationality, presence, equality, nondomination, unity, and difference.[27] The church will always fall short of corresponding to God perfectly. As Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen writes, "the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit is qualitatively different because, as created beings, we can form a unity only in a certain measure."[28] Nonetheless, we can trust that the Spirit will redeem our feeble efforts and work continually to enfold us into the life of God. Below, I will expound upon each of these guidelines before developing a theology of leadership that corresponds to the perichoretic life of God.

First, as the triune God exists in perichoretic relationship, so also the church strives to exist in perichoretic relationship with each other and between communities. Corresponding to God's perichoretic relationality calls us to move away from an understanding of a person as a Cartesian monad and toward an understanding of a person as a person-in-relationship who finds his or her identity in and through relationship.[29] It is what Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas describes as a move from being an individual to being a person, from conforming to the "hypostasis of our biological existence" to participating in the "hypostasis of our ecclesial existence."[30] While we cannot experience a fully perichoretic fellowship with others as God does with Godself, we can experience what Muthiah calls a "mediated indwelling" —"if a person is in the Spirit, and the Spirit

[27] Robert A. Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers in the Twenty-First Century: Living Faithfully as the Whole People of God in a Postmodern Context* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2009). See also Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 286–291.
[28] Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community*, 287.
[29] See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 86–98; Thayer-Bacon.
[30] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: 1985), 50

is in another person, then a form of person-to-person indwelling does exist."[31] A community that indwells each other in the Spirit will recognize their interdependency and actively work together toward mutual edification.

The second way the church should correspond to the Trinity is presence.[32] In the perichoretic life of God, Father, Son, and Spirit are fully present in and for each other.[33] Furthermore, God is open to the world as the ecstatic love of God overflows into creation and invites creation to participate in the fellowship of God.[34] The triune God is always for the other. If the church is to be a community characterized by "presence-for-the-other," we must move beyond ecclesiocentric models of church that prioritize institutional continuity and orient our life together around what God is doing in our communities.[35] In an age of cultural pluralism, we must be careful of where we draw boundaries and how we exclude others. Traditional ways of doing church in North America have often served to exclude those who are different. New ecclesial structures must be formed that tear down walls and facilitate presence with and for the other in our communities.

Thirdly, the church's relationships should be characterized by equality in correspondence to the equality of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person of the trinity acts differently in their perichoretic relationship; however, there is no hierarchy among roles even though the Father is the origin of the Spirit and the Son. Similarly, even though each member of the body of Christ has been gifted with different charisms and plays a different role, no charism or role is to be valued above others. The reality of sin and broken relationships make power dynamics and inequalities inevitable, but this is not an excuse for perpetuating hierarchical ecclesial structures. As we participate more fully in the life of God and allow the Spirit

[31] Muthiah, *Priesthood*, 66.
[32] Muthiah, *Priesthood*, 61.
[33] Moltmann, *Trinity*, 126.
[34] Moltmann, *Trinity*, 90.
[35] Cf. Alan Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2015); Alan Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2011).

to sanctify us more completely, we should expect to move toward more equal and mutually life-giving relationships. The criterion of equality does not rule out the possibility of setting some apart to perform certain functions. However, it does undermine any effort to elevate clergy over laity. Equality in our relationships leads us to prioritize the general calling placed upon every believer in their baptism over the special calling some receive to ordained ministry.

Nondomination is also a characteristic of the church that corresponds to the life of God. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit do not compel each other to return their love nor perform any action, so also coercion and domination of any form do not belong in the life of the church.[36] Rather, just as love unites the triune God and overflows outward to persuade us to participate in the life of God, so the love that is present in our community must be characterized by persuasion and nondomination. This has special relevance to congregational leadership, which has often abused its authority to coerce persons into promoting the church institution and its clergy rather than the mission of God. Leadership that corresponds to the nondominating love of God will be characterized by the story of Jesus, particularly how he refused to use coercion even when it meant death on a cross.[37]

While Moltmann starts with the Trinity, God's "perichoretic at-oneness" is always in the background.[38] Corresponding to this, believers are drawn into the fellowship of God, filled with God's holy love, and empowered with the freedom to be one in our love for each other in God. This is the telos for which Jesus prays in the High Priestly prayer (John 17:21–23). We must aim toward union in the missio dei even when we might disagree on how to do that

[36] See Moltmann, *Trinity*, 202. There are times when erring church members need to be removed from the community in order to call the member to repentance and to protect others. Cf. Matthew 18:15–20 and 1 Corinthians 5: 9–13. While church discipline has been abused many times, removal from Christian community is not necessarily an act of coercion. The power of church discipline is held by the community and placed upon an individual who has the freedom to either enter into a time of prayer and repentance or to withdraw from that community and continue in his or her ways.

[37] Cf. Gorman.

[38] Moltmann, *Trinity*, 157.

most faithfully and effectively. In correspondence with God's unity, we also must enter into communion with other communities of believers. This will involve active ecumenical work within and outside of one's community as congregations live into that moment of full unity that will be realized only when God is all in all.

Muthiah comes full circle in this discussion by finishing with differentiation. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit all participate in different ways in God's actions, and just as each has a different relationship with the others, so also in our unity in our one baptism, we maintain our distinct identities.[39] Furthermore, just as these distinctions are vital to maintaining the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, so also are our God-given distinctions vital to our unity.[40] They are not hindrances toward unity but actually what makes true unity in love possible, for love is always love for another. Ecclesial structures must take difference seriously within communities by making space for persons with different charisms, levels of ability, and cultural backgrounds to be welcome. Differences between communities must be respected by others and recognized as valuable contributions to the body of Christ.

Relationality, presence, equality, nondomination, unity, and difference are six important ways that the church corresponds to the triune God. These can be understood as guidelines as we construct new faithful church practices and transform existing ones. Before moving on to look at how shared leadership embodies each of these values, we must develop a theology of shared ministry that corresponds to the perichoretic life of God.

Theology of Ministry

Early in the days of Israel, the Levites were set aside to perform specific religious functions on behalf of Israel. The early church continued this practice of setting aside certain persons through the ministry of the Twelve who were devoted "to prayer and to serving the word" (Acts 6:4). The threefold office of bishop,

[39] Volf, 182ff.

[40] See Dwight J. Zscheile, "The Trinity, Leadership, and Power," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6(2) (Fall 2007): 47.

presbyter, and deacon emerged by the end of the first century and became universal by the end of the second.[41] Over time, church structures became progressively hierarchical as the Western church increasingly emphasized the sacerdotal nature of ordination.[42] In the Protestant Reformation, ordained ministry as rooted in the general baptism of all believers was recovered and used to argue that no ministry structure or ordination status can ever lift us above this one baptism.

Our one baptism, however, does not mean that we all participate in the missio dei in the same way. Rather, we perform different functions according to the "manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). The New Testament contains several different lists of Spirit-given charisms that "are universally distributed among the members of the fellowship" with no suggestion of hierarchy.[43] In 1 Corinthians, Paul is exhorting his readers to use their charisms for the good of the community following "the more excellent way," that is, out of the love of God (1 Cor. 12:31ff.). As Kärkkäinen reminds us, "the gifts are distributed 'just as the Spirit wills' (1 Cor. 12.17)," in all of our diversity.[44] All believers are invited to participate in the missio dei with whatever gifts they have received from the Spirit.

One way that charisms are used to participate in the missio dei is through the priesthood. Ministers are set aside for the specific function of "pointing the congregation to the presence of Christ in our midst… [and] narrating our lives in a manner quite different from that of the world," as Methodist bishop William Willimon writes.[45] While communities of believers have historically authorized pastors to be the primary ones to fulfill this

[41] Roger D. Haight, *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*, vol. 1 (New York: Continuum, 2004), 84–85; Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 537ff.
[42] Cooke, 555ff.
[43] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Church as Charismatic Fellowship: Ecclesiological Reflections from the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic Dialogue," in *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader*, ed. Chris Green (Boston: Brill, 2016), 18.
[44] Kärkkäinen, "Charismatic Fellowship," 20.
[45] William H. Willimon, *Pastor: Revised Edition: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2016), 86.

function, pastors have never been the only ones in a community that perform this function. As Muthiah puts it, symbolic leadership "is a shared activity, an activity of the priesthood of all believers. It may be the pastor who gives it the most sustained attention and effort, but the interpretive work must be carried out by the whole congregation."[46] This sentiment addresses the many different ways that pastors provide leadership. They never individually perform their office but do so as persons-in-relation within a community. As they exercise symbolic, organizational, political, and relational leadership, their task is to help all believers to use their charisms to more fully participate in the missio dei.[47] Reframing ordained ministry along these guidelines does not eliminate the possibility of a solo pastor under a more traditional model of church leadership. It does, however, compel pastors and other congregational leaders to be the first to practice presence-for-the-other and the last to use coercion and domination.

Shared Leadership in Ministry as a Faithful Practice

Relationality, presence, equality, nondomination, unity, and difference are six important ways in which the church is called to correspond to the life of God as it is called by God to participate in Christ through the power of the Spirit. In what ways does shared leadership in ministry embody these guidelines?

1) **Relationality**: Shared leadership assumes that we are fundamentally persons-in-relation. Growth-in-connection occurs as we encounter God through others and collectively journey toward increased participation in the life of God. The shared leadership team at WCC embodied this by focusing on relationships among the staff and their families, as well as by inviting young

[46] Robert Muthiah, "A Practical Theology of the Royal Priesthood: Trinitarian Ecclesiology, Institutions of Postmodernity, and Congregational Practices in Dialogue" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005), 222. Cf. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 5th ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2013), Part 5.
[47] See Zscheile, 56.

seminary students to join them at leadership meetings. They were committed to being more than just colleagues; they were brothers and sisters in Christ.

2) **Presence**: By emphasizing growth-in-connection, shared leadership prioritizes presence-for-the-other in interactions among team members and with others outside the team. WCC's leadership team consistently advocated for each other before the church board and were committed to the flourishing of their fellow team members. When one of the pastors was undergoing significant personal difficulties that ultimately led to his resignation, the other pastors were by his side to journey with him and his family through the trials.

3) **Equality**: Shared leadership values and makes space for the unique contributions of every team member. By practicing fluid expertise, every participant can contribute with different voices having primary influence depending upon the situation. At WCC, pastors took turns with public duties including preaching and administering the sacraments. They also frequently invited new lay persons into important leadership opportunities.

4) **Nondomination**: Shared leadership expects that each participant influences others. When the team acts, they do so collectively, knowing that they succeed and fail as a team. At WCC, Pastor Eric refused to exploit his authority as lead pastor and instead invited others into leadership. The other pastors shared power within their own ministries so that many congregants considered themselves congregational leaders.

5) **Unity**: Shared leadership teams exercise collective agency toward a shared goal. Even when participants act individually, they do so with the authorization of the team and while being formed by the team because

of their shared commitment to growth-in-connection. Pastors at WCC had agreed-upon processes and primary spheres of influence. They knew that when they acted, they were authorized by the congregation and the shared leadership team. When important decisions needed to be made, such as the decision to sell their building, the pastoral staff included the church board and congregants in the decision-making process.

6) **Difference**: Shared leadership values the different charisms of participants by practicing fluid expertise and expects participants to mutually influence each other. At WCC, pastors deferred to others when a different ministry leader needed to be the primary influencer and consulted with their pastoral team when facing complex situations.

Although our efforts at corresponding to the triune God will always fall short, shared leadership takes seriously who God is and how communities of believers are called to participate in God. Instead of providing a church structure where one individual holds the final voice and is responsible for community life, it involves two or more persons-in-relation who are valued and respected because of their differences, and where they will be encouraged and edified as they grow more faithfully into the likeness of Christ.

The Role of Power in Faith Communities

If the telos of all creation is for God to be all in all, the need for leadership may disappear when we are full participants in the perichoretic life of God. Power dynamics and disparities will be eliminated, for all will be equally empowered to complete the task at hand—giving "praise to our God" (Rev. 19:5). Until that day, however, the people of God are called to participate in God's work of moving creation toward that telos. We need each other to exercise leadership through completing the many details necessary to run an organization, helping us to narrate our lives in light of the story of God, and journeying with us through the good and

bad times. We need each other's influence to help us participate more faithfully in the life of God. Yet, power dynamics are real and heavily influence our life together. Racial, gender, socioeconomic, and ability inequalities hinder a community's faithfulness. Consequently, it is important to understand the ways that power is abused in organizations before exploring how shared leadership facilitates a faithful use of power.

Abuse of power rests upon the assumption of scarcity.[48] When resources are limited, coalitions and individuals must compete to secure resources for themselves and their interests. Power ("the capacity to make things happen") is unequally distributed across society according to who has the most capital, including symbolic, structural, or relational capital, among other forms.[49] Strategies to secure resources will vary depending upon the source(s) and amount of accumulated capital. At WCC, Eric has structural capital but relies primarily upon relational and symbolic capital to bring about change. The old guard still holds relational capital among well-tenured congregants but has lost structural capital as power is diffused throughout the congregation.

Power is not wrong in and of itself. It would be extremely difficult to tell the story of God in the Bible without referencing the incredible power of God. Yet the moment when we see God at God's weakest is simultaneously when we see God at God's most powerful moment. As Moltmann reminded us, the cross is the fullest revelation of God, the moment when we learn the most about God's power. The cross shows us a God who is not powerful

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[48] Bolman and Deal, Part Four.

[49] Bolman and Deal, 190. Some have more power than others, but everybody has some capacity to make things happen. Prisoners go on hunger strikes, the marginalized engage in bus boycotts, and the Son, who emptied himself of everything except love, exhausted the powers of evil by submitting to the cross. While recognizing that everybody has some amount of subject-agency, Christians must still heed the call to "claim the margin" and use their resources to participate in the liberating work of God. Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster/ John Knox, 1993), 193. For more on capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, trans. Richard Nice, eds. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposky (Malden, Mass.: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 82.

enough to do anything but a God who is powerful enough to love infinitely. When all seemed lost, love conquered sin, hate, and death. By this act, the triune God showed us how to use power on behalf of the other. When Christians use power, they do so as participants in the life of God. We have the Spirit of the Risen Christ in our midst and have been gifted with charisms. We should not deny we have power but must constantly aim to use our power in love for the other.

Unfortunately, Christians often live out of the myth of scarcity, using power to protect their own interests instead of in love for the other.[50] We think we are protecting others or the church, but really, we are just protecting ourselves. Prevailing monarchical leadership models have made it too easy for clergy to abuse their power in the name of Jesus. New leadership practices will not rid the church of power inequality or power abuse. However, moving away from monarchical leadership and toward more shared forms of leadership will facilitate participation in the life of God because of the way it corresponds to the life of God.

Each of the four core characteristics (mutual influence, collective agency, fluid expertise, and growth-in-connection) of shared leadership help congregational leaders use power in love for the other because they correspond to the life of God. First, mutual influence among team members provides accountability for the way they use their power. Shared leadership participants expect each other to speak into their lives and identify areas where they might be using power inappropriately. Growth-in-connection follows from this as participants extend grace to others and receive grace through others. In this manner, shared leadership teams can be a place where sanctification takes place and old habits of abusing power are transformed and renewed. Exercising collective agency ensures that power is distributed across the team, preventing one individual from amassing too much power. Finally, fluid expertise facilitates equality by allowing every participant to have the chance

[50] Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," in *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2000).

to lead and to follow depending upon the situation and who has the necessary knowledge. Together, these four characteristics make it more likely that power will be used on behalf of others and not abused for selfish gain

At WCC, Eric became the center of many longtime parishioners' frustrations. After all, they thought, he was the one who changed things. He was the one who redirected power away from the old guard and started giving it to the newcomers who did not understand how things were supposed to be done. As the balloon payment on their mortgage neared, the church did not know how they were going to pay for it. Some older members had been withholding their tithe as a way to exercise their power, and not enough funds had come in from the newer members. Tension had reached a boiling point. Some of the more tenured members decided to make their last stand and force Eric to resign.

The problem with this plan was the way shared leadership had allowed power to be diffused throughout the congregation. Eric had not hoarded power and thus was in no position to enter into a power struggle. More importantly, he, along with much of the congregation, was committed to shared leadership and the way that this facilitated their increased participation in the life of God. They were committed to living in a community that put others first and saw their differences as vital to their unity. They were uninterested in coercing congregants and sought to find ways for everybody to do life together, even those who struggled to embrace new changes.

Consequently, instead of imposing his will through the use of power, Eric resigned. He knew that as long as he continued to be the focal point, the church would eat itself from the inside as it did when the church divided fifteen years before. Because the congregation had been practicing shared leadership, two staff pastors and several congregants were prepared to call the congregation to do the adaptive work necessary to move forward. They needed to become a community that used power in a manner consistent with the crucified Jesus. Eric did not see this action as being "assassinated," as leadership scholar Ronald Heifetz would put it, but as an opportunity to turn the heat up by allowing the

people with the problem to do the work.[51] He showed the myth of scarcity to be a sham by revealing the abundance of power that had been dispersed throughout the congregation. For three months, they worked together to call out abuses of power, repent of the ways they had promoted division, and identify the work that God was doing in their community.

Finally, they were in a place where they could invite Eric back onto the pastoral team. Some people left the church, unable to share WCC's vision. Others left once the underlying conflict in the church had been exposed. But a committed core allowed the Spirit to transform them into a community that participated ever more faithfully in the life of the triune God. Their use of shared leadership over the past three years had given them a glimpse of how power could be used for the other. In faith, they committed to continue the long adaptive process of becoming a people who were one in their diversity rather than a people founded upon division. Over the next few years, the church went through a painful process during which they sold their property, trimmed their programs, and continued to lose people. However, today, they own a building, are debt free, and have extra space that has been rented out to community partners who share their vision of contributing to the flourishing of their community. Likely, they will never be as large as they once were, but they are convinced that they are more faithfully participating in the perichoretic life of God as a community.

WCC made great strides toward more faithful uses of power, but organizational theorist Joyce Fletcher offers a necessary caution: even so-called post-heroic leadership models, which includes shared leadership, have large hurdles to jump before true equality can be had.[52] Fletcher argues that in the United States, heroic leadership practices are often associated with masculine attributes,

[51] Heifetz, 235–49**.** In other situations, resigning would have a much different meaning and outcome. However, in this case study, the practice of shared leadership allowed Eric to resign and show that he was not the center of power that some thought he was. He chose to show by example how to use power by participating in the story of God rather than to engage in a political struggle.
[52] Joyce K. Fletcher, "The Paradox of Postheroic Leadership: An Essay on Gender, Power, and Transformational Change," *The Leadership Quarterly* 15 (2004): 647–61.

and post-heroic leadership practices are often associated with feminine attributes.[53] Because of this, when men practice post-heroic leadership, it is noticed and comes with the expectation of reciprocation. During times of success, they can share how moving toward a more relational style of leadership helped them overcome adversity.[54] When women practice post-heroic leadership, it is often rendered invisible because they are just being women, for "in Western society women are expected to be the carriers of relational skills and attributes."[55] Fletcher exhorts practitioners of post-heroic leadership to pay attention to the gendered realities of power in their midst and address them frankly. Fletcher's colleagues, Robin Ely and Debra Meyerson, conclude that organizations should not make gender equality the goal so much as the process of transformation itself. Only when organizations make transformation of gendered norms the goal are organizations finally able to take real steps toward gender equality.[56] This resonates with Christian communities that know they will only experience full equality in the eschaton. We, too, must make transformation, increased participation in the life of God, the goal.

Theologian Jacquelyn Grant provides another warning for those who would practice more shared forms of leadership. In her essay "The Sin of Servanthood," she argues that Christian communities need to shift from servant language to discipleship language. Some marginalized communities, particularly African American women and other women of color in the United States, tend to be "more servant than others."[57] Moreover, "servanthood language has, in effect, been one of subordination."[58] Discipleship language, on the

[53] Fletcher, "Paradox," 650–51.
[54] Fletcher, "Paradox," 652–53.
[55] Fletcher, "Paradox," 654. See also Joyce K. Fletcher, *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice at Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999).
[56] Robin J. Ely and Debra E. Meyerson, "Theories of Gender in Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Analysis and Change," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22 (2000): 103–51.
[57] Jacquelyn Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood: And the Deliverance of Discipleship," in *A Troubling in My Soul*, 204.
[58] Grant, 214.

other hand, provides "a more meaningful way of speaking about the life-work of Christians."[59] Like the language of servant, shared leadership can be used to cover racial and gender inequalities without properly addressing the underlying systemic issues. Just as Christian communities call all to be servants while leaving the most menial work to those on the margins, so also shared leadership teams are ever in danger of claiming that all persons on the team are valued while consistently dismissing female voices or voices of people of color. They must make transformation the goal and continually yield themselves to the Spirit in order to allow both women and men in shared leadership teams to become fully who God is calling them to be.

Shared leadership teams should never assume that power inequalities are not growing or that power is not being abused. Rather, they must stay vigilant, trusting that the Spirit will work in their lives to enfold them increasingly into the life of God. With caution and complete reliance upon the Spirit, shared leadership can be a more faithful practice of leadership for congregations that are seeking to participate in the perichoretic life of God.

Conclusion

Our experience with the economy of God is, as Job 26:14 puts it, "indeed but the outskirts of his ways… how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?" Consequently, perichoretic love cannot claim to be the essence of Godself, but it is a helpful metaphor that gives us a glimpse of God's nature. Similarly, Muthiah's six guidelines are helpful but not the last word on ways the church can be structured to allow members to more faithfully participate in the life of God. Rather, they are a contribution offered to help communities of believers move forward in faithfulness. As Paul writes, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face." In faith, we move forward, knowing that one day we "will know fully, even as [we] have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

[59] Grant, 214.

While shared leadership has been an important faithful practice in many congregations, including Wesleyan Community Church, many questions remain. First, few empirical studies have been conducted on shared leadership in congregations.[60] Thus, the assertions in this study about the kind of people and attributes shared leadership cultivates await more thorough empirical confirmation. Second, the defining characteristics of shared leadership need to be compared with the realities of shared leadership teams, refined, and put into conversation with how shared leadership teams understand themselves. Third, further research needs to consider what is shared, who shares it, and how it is shared.[61] Finally, how power is used in shared leadership teams in congregations needs to be compared with how power is used in other forms of leadership. This includes more traditional, hierarchical forms of leadership as well as in the practice of team leadership, which is often similar to shared leadership but still contains a formal, hierarchical leader.

Shared leadership is not a panacea for all congregations. Many congregations will find other leadership practices that are theologically faithful and allow power to be used in ways that facilitate participation in the life of God. Yet for many congregations, practicing shared leadership has allowed them to structure their life together in ways that match their convictions about who God is. Through the way that participants mutually influence each other, exercise collective agency, practice fluid expertise, and nurture growth-in-relationship, shared leadership teams live out

[60] See Lauren D'Innocenzo, John E. Mathieu, and Michael R. Kukenberger, "A Meta-Analysis of Different Forms of Shared Leadership—Team Performance Relations," *Journal of Management* 42(7) (2016): 1964–91; Zhu et al; Nathaniel J. Herbst, "Leader–Leader Exchange in Shared Leadership Teams: An Investigation of Collaborative Harmony Among Co-Leaders in Christian Ministry" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Piedmont International University, 2017); Abigail J. Veliquette, "Shared Leadership and Member Engagement in Western Protestant House Churches: A Naturalistic Inquiry" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Colorado State University, 2013); Michael Shane Wood, "The Effects of Shared Leadership on the Stress and Satisfaction Outcomes of Church Management Team Members" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Regent University, 2004).

[61] These questions are drawn from Robert C. Barnett and Nancy K. Weidenfeller, "Shared Leadership and Team Performance," *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 18(3) (2016): 347.

their identity as participants in the life of God. Because of human nature, we will inevitably fall short. Nonetheless, shared leadership is a practice that can help us participate more faithfully in the life of God as we attempt to lean into our baptism.