

# Beyond Worship



a queer worship, liturgy, & theology zine  
of Fort Washington Collegiate Church

edited by: James Admans

**Cover description:** a collage of headshots of all authors of the Beyond Worship zine overlay a watercolor rainbow heart. “Beyond Worship” is written in cursive font at the top. In regular font at the bottom, “a queer worship, liturgy, & theology zine of Fort Washington Collegiate Church. Edited by: James Admans.” The background is a light blue watercolor painting.

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## *A note from the editor*

Friends, it is with so much joy and gratitude that I present the *Beyond Worship* zine. The words and faith journeys of these artists are so deep and powerful. Queer magic brought these pages together. In a society that often seeks to invalidate LGBTQIA+ people of faith, I am thrilled to know that these authors have space to share their gifts, talents, and wisdom.

*Beyond Worship* arose when Fort Washington Collegiate Church, an open and affirming (ONA) congregation of the United Church of Christ located in Upper Manhattan, recognized that church communities need not just be open, but also to put faith in action and grow into what it means to be affirming. To be affirming means that LGBTQIA+ people are not only welcome and included, but that the church must recognize queer and trans folks have something to offer: to reshape and reconfigure what it means to be a person of faith and to rethink and recreate what it means to be in community together. *Beyond Worship* is made with the goal to queer the church, and to do so, we must queer the very center of our community—our weekly Sunday worship.

Although I hope that you enjoy reading these selections, my hope is that each piece will be further brought to life in Fort Washington's worship services. Accepted contributors are invited to share their writings either virtually or in person throughout the remainder of 2021 and 2022. Additionally, because of Fort Washington's commitment to social and economic justice, all accepted contributors have been offered a stipend for their work.

The prompt for *Beyond Worship* was simple: any written material by LGBTQIA+ authors that can be shared in a worship space. Each submission is divinely different, capturing a variety of aspects at the intersection of queerness, transness, and faith in the forms of liturgy, poetry, song, ritual, and theological reflection.

I am so grateful for all contributors who made *Beyond Worship* possible. I would like to acknowledge and extend gratitude to Rev. Dr. Damaris Whittaker, Rev. Michael Vanacore, Dinean Davis, Laurrinda Hatcher, David Ford, Chris Whittaker, Allison Dilyard, Beverley Sheares, Robert Arnau, Harmeet Kamboj, and Sarah Morgan Davis for their support and additional gratitude to the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship that has generously funded *Beyond Worship* through their Vital Worshipping Communities Grant.

With gratitude,  
*James Admans*

## Contributors



**Kimi Floyd Reisch** (they/them) is an interfaith advocate, educator and movement builder. Kimi Floyd uses healing stories from many cultures and places to guide people to a deeper understanding of who they are and who they want to become. They earned their Master of Divinity degree at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in Minnesota and are currently working on a Doctoral degree in Public Theology. As a pansexual, two-spirit person, growing up in Wyoming, they learned that hearing each others stories is essential for mutual respect. Their faith is centered in their Siksiká, Delaware, Mahican, and Scots-Irish heritage. They are a member at City of Refuge UCC in Oakland, California.

**Pastor Lucia Chappelle** (she/her) is the Social Justice Minister of Founders Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)/Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana (ICM) Fundadora, Los Angeles. She was licensed clergy in MCC from 1977-1987, leading several congregations, serving as Dean of Samaritan Theological Institute, and representing the church in many social justice actions. She's currently a member of the Creative Worship Team, the Women's Spirituality Group, Azania: People of African Descent, the Deaf Ministry and the Archives Committee.



In her parallel career as a journalist in alternative media, Pastor Lucia helped start the LGBTQ radio show "IMRU" on KPFK-Pacific Radio, Los Angeles in 1975, where she was Program Director from 1987-1994. She has been Associate Producer of the syndicated show *This Way Out: the International LGBT Radio Magazine* since its inception in 1988. Working in print media as well as radio, she was the WomanTimes editor of the national LGBTQ newspaper *Coast to Coast Times* from 1977-1978.

Now a worldwide denomination, MCC was born in the LGBTQ community in October, 1968 — nine months before the Stonewall Rebellion. During the late 1980s, another "rebellion" took place within MCC. A number of congregations arose with a specific mission to speak the Gospel to the lesbian feminist community. Lucia served as pastor of one of those congregations, DeColores MCC in Los Angeles, and wrote innovative worship materials. Her special gift was to re-write familiar Christian hymns with lesbian feminist images and language.



**Jory Mickelson** (he/they) is a queer/nonbinary poet, educator, and retreat leader who lives in the Pacific Northwest. They currently attend Luther Seminary, where they are pursuing their Master's of Divinity.

**Peter Totten** (they/she) is an Emmy Award-Winning filmmaker and video artist currently based in Toronto, Ontario. Their work has been screened in galleries and festivals in Asia, Europe, and North America. Peter's work is exploratory in nature, seeking to highlight the beauty in lived experience; utilizing the essay film form and visual anthropology to represent communities in ways grounded in care and mutual respect.



While **joshua david murphy** (they/he/she) does not necessarily like labels, they understand that they are needed to help us communicate with one another through representation. mr. dr. murphy identifies as a queer, genderful, Indigenous-American, who is hard of hearing, and denominational. They are the face behind *The Every Ministries*, a multi-disciplinary outreach and collective that is geared toward creating conversations and continuing them daily with whoever wants to talk.



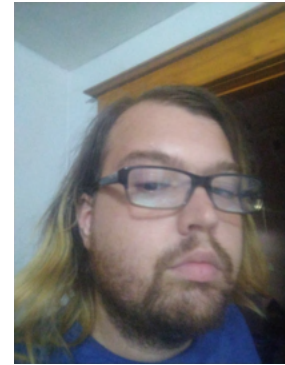
**Micah Brady** (she/her) is a recent English writing graduate of Biola University in Los Angeles, striving to heal the separation of the LGBTQ+ community and the church with her words.

**Aisling “Ash” Rowan** (they/them) is a bird buff, general enthusiast, and aspiring fossil, who advocates for fully-inclusive celebration of the infinitely diverse ways of being human. Describing themselves as “liminally Mormon” and a Unitarian Universalist, Ash strives to emulate the devoted discipleship and radical kindness of Fred Rogers, and seeks Truth and light wherever it may be found. Ash Rowan currently lives with their spouse and sprogs in the valleys of Utah, where magpies sing about home.



**Kōan Anne Brink** (they/them) was born and raised in Minnesota. They are the author of the poetry chapbook *The End of Lake Superior* (Above/Ground, 2021). Kōan currently holds the position of Art Writing Fellow at The Cooper Union. Raised Lutheran, they are also a lay ordained Sōtō Zen student practicing with teachers at Brooklyn Zen Center, where they are an active member in the LGBTQ Dharma Share. Their current home is Austin, Texas.

**Rain Lovegrove** (they/them) is a recovering evangelical, and graduate of Great Lakes Christian College (double major Psychology/Theology). Their beagle thinks they should get more exercise, and their Old Testament professor would like to remind them that while their assessment of the text is not inaccurate, it's not the way we talk in church.



**Mary Barber** (she/her) is a psychiatrist, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, and a transitional deacon in the Episcopal diocese of New York, preparing to be ordained a priest in September 2021.

**Nordia Bennett** (she/they) is a preacher, writer, creator, and educator. She recently graduated with her Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary. Nordia believes that the revelation of God is on earth, here and now waiting to be experienced. When Nordia is not working, she enjoys iced matcha lattes and spending time with her friends.



**James Admans** (they/them) is a nonbinary, queer Christian theologian who currently serves as the Assistant Minister at Fort Washington Collegiate Church. They received their M.Div. degree in Ministerial Leadership from Union Theological Seminary in 2021 and were the recipient of the prestigious Malcolm Boyd Veritas Award for their advocacy and social justice work on behalf of the LGBTQIA+ community. James runs a public queer theology project on Instagram (@theology.queen) and performs as a drag artist who goes by the name Marge.



## *Flames of Love*

by Kimi Floyd Reisch

We light the flame of commitment,  
To stand with and work to create change,  
Until all know they are beloved.

We light the flame of survival,  
Grateful for our lives,  
Remembering in love those lost along the road.

We light the flame of change,  
Committing to recenter toward love,  
In hearts, in minds, in our world.

We light the flame of hope,  
Loving each other, building community,  
even when it is uncomfortable.

We light the flame of knowledge,  
Following the path of justice,  
Justice that is love embodied.

We light this flame of radical love, and commit:  
To speak out for those who have been silenced.  
Those who have been rejected for who they love.  
Those who have been persecuted for who they are.  
Those who have been bullied for daring to be bold.  
Those who have been othered and forced into the margins.  
Those who have been lonely.  
Those who have been hurt.  
Those who are still hurting.

We light this flame as  
a people committed,  
we are survivors.  
we will change the world,  
until no one lives without hope,  
until no one lives without justice.  
We light this flame and pledge that  
In love, with love, and through love,  
All things are possible.

## *A Collection of Lesbian/Feminist Christmas Carols*

by Lucia A. Chappelle

### **O Come, All My Sisters (O Come, All Ye Faithful)**

O come, all my sisters, joyful and collective,  
Take pride in the new life that God lives in us!  
Christ's new born Body, now in us appearing.

Refrain: Be open to the coming,  
Be open to the coming,  
Be open to the coming,  
Of God in the flesh!

Sharing our crises, pooling our resources,  
We're blest in an atmosphere of Sisterhood;  
Nothing comes easy, everything is magic.

Refrain

God is our anchor, Christ our Predecessor,  
Church makes us realize the glorious news:  
Life is a love-gift, living is a gamble!

Refrain

***Indigent Sister***  
***(Away in a Manger)***

Outside on a park bench, no place for a bed,  
A poor starving sister lays down her gray head.  
The chill of the night air, the city's heart cold,  
While to Baby Jesus they offer their gold.

The shoppers are bustling, the Christmas lights blink,  
Gift-giving is loving, or so some folks think;  
But what must it look like to one such as she,  
The indigent sister in her misery.

The love of the Christ child is not so abstract  
To let me walk past you without looking back;  
Stay with me, dear sister, and try to forgive  
'Til the calling of Christmas is one I can live.

**Feel Creation Grow More Whole  
(Hark! The Herald Angels Sing)**

Feel creation grow more whole  
Glory to the mended soul!  
This the reason Christ was sent --  
Seal the human element.  
Hierarchy isn't best  
Put God's motives to the test:  
Living life is not a curse --  
Vengeful sacrifice is worse!

Refrain: Feel creation grow more whole  
Glory to the mended soul!

We, the Church, experience  
God's astounding imminence  
Passed between each woman here  
Bringing out the vision clear:  
Forging our own Wanderground  
Where our power can be found,  
Where, like Christ, we unify  
Flesh and spirit, nat'rally.

Refrain

I, like Christ, am one with God  
I am healed through sisterlove,  
Blessed fruit of my own womb,  
Holy Amazon become!  
Give and take my sisters' aid,  
Both the midwife and the babe,  
Woman and divine am I,  
Limitless possibilities!

Refrain

***What Faith Is This?  
(What Child Is This?)***

What faith is this that births the Word,  
That braves the challenge of prophecy?  
That risks the toll to yield control,  
To rest on the truth of life's myst'ry?

Refrain: This, this is woman's faith,  
To trust the magic that God creates.  
Look, look to the wondrous sign,  
The ebb and flow of the seasons.

What faith is this that turns the earth  
From death to life in succession?  
That sees God's face in Nature's pace:  
The sun's return is salvation.

Refrain

***Joy to the World!***  
***(Joy to the World!)***

Joy to the world! God's people come  
To be Christ's hands and feet!  
With open hearts and open minds  
We seek to spread the peace ... !

Joy to the earth! our sacred home,  
Entrusted to our care!  
By choosing to be human, God joined in our communion  
All creatures everywhere ... !

No more shall hate divide the saints,  
Nor bigotry belong!  
The gay, the bi, the straight, the lesbians and transfolk  
Join in the heav'nly song ... !

God sent the Son to liberate  
The Christ in each of us,  
That greater things than Jesus did we would do also,  
Work wonders with God's love ... !

***The Baby With the Two-Edged Sword  
(O Little Town of Bethlehem)***

The baby with the two-edged sword  
Is in our midst today,  
Seductive in her innocence  
As at my breast she lay;  
Yet see her dark eyes gleaning  
The secrets of my soul,  
The wall I built around myself  
As loving takes its toll.

For Christ was born of Mary  
And saw how it could be,  
To lose that trusting openness  
And vulnerability;  
But could Christ have imagined  
That love could be replaced,  
By pious songs and spending throngs,  
Much easier to face?

The pictures of the glowing child  
Too holy to be hurt  
Don't speak to the experience  
Of treachery on earth;  
But this new Christmas infant,  
With wisdom in her smile,  
Reminds us of love's double-edge --  
To heal or to beguile.

Oh, baby with the two-edged sword  
Cut through my frightened shield,  
Inspire me with courage  
For it's dangerous to feel.  
Projection of my passion,  
I take you back again;  
Revive in me the faith to be  
A gentle, risking friend!

***Healing Night, Raging Night  
(Silent Night, Holy Night)***

Healing night, raging night  
Women weep at their plight,  
Circling nurturers comfort give,  
Blessed with new kinds of spiritual gifts.  
Christ's new body is born, Christ's new body is born!

Healing night, raging night,  
Ne'er before such a sight,  
Christian lesbians hand in hand,  
Many theories, one mighty band,  
Christ's new body is born, Christ's new body is born!



## *What is Holy?*

by Jory Mickelson

Once, my friend's house was full of rats and his landlord told him,  
"It's this town. The rats are everybody's problem."

Because I wear a collar, people think my prayers have more power than theirs do.

Sometimes I have been called faggot for holding another man's hand.

A church sign says, *Grace isn't about what you can do, but what God has done*  
and I always know there are conditions they couldn't fit on the sign.

Holiness is feeding a stellar jay, who tells another, who tells another,  
and then the air is full of squalling.

\*

My therapist reminds me, when I go on complaining about my life, everyone has problems.

The fuchsia christmas cactus blooming out of season is holy.

When driving anywhere in my collar, I love to see people's double-takes in the other cars. As if  
I should only be riding a bicycle or maybe a horse.

One church sign says, *Choose the bread of life or you are toast.*  
The church across from it has a sign that says, *The gospel is anti-fascist.*

I finally realized the problem was never being gay, but what other people thought about it.

\*

At the arcade, a transwoman helps my boyfriend and I turn bills into tokens, and I think  
this must be some kind of kingdom that God has made.

A church sign says, *God doesn't need your prayers, he needs your actions* which make me  
think  
of William Shatner saying, "What does God need with a starship?"

I want to say to my congregation, "God is everybody's problem," implying like the landlord, it's  
not my problem. Implying, you're on your own.

When I wear my collar to my favorite coffeeshop, the baristas always tease me  
and they are laughing and I am laughing. Laughing together,

none of us believe I am wearing this collar and I would call this grace.

Holiness is saying, I love you to the same man for 18 years I never intended to keep.

\*

Today, the only thing holy is the cat asleep in his patch of sun.

Sometimes I am called faggot for no reason.

When wearing my clerical collar strangers offer to let me cut ahead of them in line or say, "You know what the problem with religion is?"

But when L's wife has another miscarriage and D's dying by inches of a neurological disease and his son is only 4 and my trans friend comes out to their parents and they cut off all ties—these are all my problems, which is a word I have come to see as synonymous with prayer.

A church sign says, *You can't enter heaven unless Jesus enters you.*

A church sign says, *The most powerful position is on your knees.*

I think, I can't be the only one thinking what I'm thinking.

\*

When I wear my clerical collar at the coffeeshop the transwoman from the arcade looks angry, then turns away.

A church sign says, *We are all in this together.*

A field of tulips, though we plant them, water them, and fence them off, is holy.

Suddenly churches want to welcome queer people and then tell them how to live their lives.

Sometimes God is the biggest problem of all.

\*

Something is happening  
in my life I didn't ask for & I don't know what to do with,  
and slowly, that's becoming okay.

I confess I am only preaching what I hope  
is true, not what I know for certain.

Now we know what is holy—  
that we have no idea what is going on.

## *A prayer that comes to me as I stare down the road*

by Peter Totten

While I drive on the interstate--headed west-- I can't help but think on the unseen and violent histories inherent within the landscapes yawning before me:

They're here, written in the land.  
(on its body)

What acts have transpired, what rules created to diminish the light and the life that has been given to each of us? Histories of bodies being governed and moved about. All this is written on the body of the land, which leads me to wonder...

What is written on my body?

Depending on your belief, my spirit (soul)  
my intelligence (mind)  
my essence; (presence)  
my aura (energy) is housed within this body.

I see my body and others see my body. I see it as only I can.

It's a feminine body.  
(a masculine body)  
It's shorter than most others I see.  
(a bit wider)

Where is my body?  
(my body is here)  
How is my body?  
(what space does it take up?)

In my mind, I create a list. A list of places; places where gender doesn't matter:

in nature      my professor's office    my high school's theatre      in my car  
while I'm riding my bike,      in my garden,      on a trail,  
in my bed

These places make up who I am, and I see myself reflected in the space I take up, and in the space I leave behind.

This prayer is a hope for the future,

a reminder of the connections we feel inside and of the love a Creator has bestowed upon us.  
A love that is infinite, that is not burdened by history, by circumstance, of biology or situation.

It is offered at all times and in all places.

May I do likewise, to myself and to those whose space I share.

## *sacred space*

by joshua david murphy

There is a place  
That nobody knows  
Except You and I  
It is not located near the ocean  
Nor can it be found in the wood

I lift my eyes to the Hills  
Where does my help  
My Fortress  
My comforter  
The one to who I belong

Come from  
Come from  
Come from, come from.

the Maker  
My Maker  
your Maker  
Our Maker

Who makes all things new

a whisper  
An answer  
Just me and you

Here  
In this scared space

where I meets You

## *Taste and See and Know*

by Micah Brady

I discovered my sexuality in a worship service. I often forget this detail, finding it insignificant.

It sprung upon me, matter-of-fact, like the knowledge had always hovered in a formless cloud in the back of my mind. It only took a moment of focus to determine its shape, to see a hidden resemblance of reality in its often ordinary and overlooked presence. I knew instinctively, not finding the answer within myself--rather, the fact was so true that it presented itself to me. I saw its striking hues and deep texture form tangibly before my eyes for the first time.

It only took a moment. The blue-green stage lights swirled over the congregants as the song ascended throughout the sanctuary, snapping my eyes simultaneously outward and inward: outward, toward the worship band and away from the girls in pews surrounding me; and inward, toward the clearing fog that had long shadowed my mental skyscape, revealing that I had, in fact, been staring at girls.

Disturbed, I peered over at some boys a few seats away. I suddenly knew that I found many people around me worthy of staring.

My father recently told me that all knowledge is a gift.

In eighth grade--the day of this worship service--I received a gift. I opened it with curiosity like a kid on Christmas morning, tearing away in anxious anticipation.

When I unfastened the gift, I saw myself: my body and her being, her knowledge and her desires. Surveying the contents within, I recognized the gift I held because I had witnessed other people receive it. I had never envied it; in fact, I had pitied recipients of this gift. Now I held it in my hands.

I thanked God kindly for the gift though I loathed it--in the same way you thank a distant relative before sliding the gift into the corner of your closet, waiting for an opportunity to discard it unnoticed.

I knew what the gift meant, and in the same moment I knew, I resolved; in the same moment it felt like angels had descended from the heavens to spell it out in clear skywriting, I resolved to look down from the heavens. I wouldn't look upward again for five years, ignoring the divinely bestowed sign.

On the ground, I wandered in dark pits of doubt, enveloped in a fog of my own narrow vision. The thick gray dulled my senses, hues losing color in the darkness and blurring to a haze. I could not feel texture, I could not see depth, I could not taste vibrant truth on my tongue. I could only tell black from white--which wasn't much at all.

I slowed, dragging myself and stumbling through the fog while my body existed far away, her preaching a soft echo. She spoke to me, "They who have ears, let them hear!" but without my body I had no ears. I could not hear, I could not taste and see.

But the church comforted me: better to have blind faith than to trust your sight, the church said; better to leave her behind than to follow her, the church said; better to lose your ears than to hear her false prophecy, the church said.

I did not trust my body. I had learned that she was the root of rebellion, her senses a slippery slope. Her desires tended toward temptation though the Spirit ached for salvation.

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to” (Galatians 5:17, ESV).

I did not trust her to live in the world, to speak and act without my guidance or permission. I wanted more than to just leave her behind; I wanted to destroy her, rend her from existence. So I dragged her, exhausted and hopeless as I was, crucified her and held her in the grave. In the gray ground I crushed her senseless, buried in the belief that the eternal death of my body was the price of spiritual resurrection.

But she was not silenced.

Five years later, she rose again. She reclaimed her voice and her sensations, so much so that she invaded my foggy slums, flipping tables and toppling my flimsy temple with her tumultuous preaching.

Her destruction complete, her knowledge demanding, she knelt down beside me in the wreckage of my stubborn refuge and gave me ears. Then she told me a story I knew but had never accepted.

She said we are a work of art, a symbiotic creation. Little did I know, my eighth grade sexuality was my incarnation; God's physical gift to my spiritual formation. Born like a gift on Christmas day, the physical and spiritual united at God's declaration, thus constituting their separation a desecration. As Jesus' birth revealed our God, my body too became a revelation. She said listen to what she had to reveal. The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, so our Lord not only resurrected his Spirit but his body too. He did not discard it nor did he leave it in the grave like I had tried to do.

So on that day of my incarnation, my body began to grow, waiting patiently, speaking whispers and prophecies until she broke out into sermons, enduring time for the sake of crucifixion.

When the time came, she burst forth from the grave, powerful and purified by the blood of the cross, shouting praises on the ground stained with damnation. She said it is through her eyes and ears and hands that I know and receive God's gifts of creation. Our being is God's image in bodily manifestation, so we must together participate in divine sanctification.

As I exist, God reveals. As God reveals, I know; and because I know, I worship. I continually open the gift and live my thankfulness, partaking in the bodily sacrament that I may taste and see and know.

All knowledge is a gift, and perhaps God gives it through the continual resurrection of body and soul.

## *On the Mount of Trans-Figuration*

by Aisling "Ash" Rowan

I climb the mountain, alone:  
hand  
    over hand  
and foot  
    over foot,  
with no one greeting me at the summit but  
birdsong and breeze.

God whispers my new name into the morning mist,  
that by which I shall be known.  
calls me son, child,  
as I offer up my body for sacrament upon Their altar  
    (Their surgery table)—  
weeping, begging, to be fixed.

dawn's light overflows into every valley,  
and that of my cavernous ribs.  
I am blessed, and newly broken,  
molded, like wet earth  
into something greater.  
but God,  
    oh, God,  
        *it hurts.*

I sleep,  
and I wake:

aching, raw,  
fingertips tracing over new scars  
like the ones borne by my Brother  
in hands  
    and in feet;

our new bodies  
    new selves  
can never be what they once were—

*isn't that the point?*

my chest burns  
and, with a smile, I exhale.  
I climb down the mountain, alone.



## *Lamentations for a Salt Flat*

by Kōan Anne Brink

My partner and I have established a recent ritual of listening to public radio sermons on long drives. The transmissions are often poor, the white noise of static cutting and overlaying the sermon with classical piano or country music, or, in some instances, an advertisement for a long-distance rifle range. In this particular sermon there is what appears to be a sort of oral treatise on thirst. The preacher today is speaking of God's love in metaphors of milk. Human beings are babies who lament the milk of God's love. Now this is all I can see across the mountains. R is not clothed in a white tee-shirt, but in a thin layer of cotton milk as he drives East. The valleys are not filled with the reflections of cloud shadows, but with the reflections of milk in the grass.

\*

Soon, the salt flats will begin to appear outside the window too, clinging to the corners of shallow rock like dried sleep in the eyes. The word "lament" comes from the Latin *lamenta*, meaning to "weep" or "wail." As in: A vast salt flat in the Western landscape *laments* their former body as a prehistoric lake. The lake can take the shape of a song or a piece of music, or a poem expressing sorrow. It often mourns (a person's loss or death). Because of the evaporating lake levels, what is classified as an island or a peninsula on a map year-to-year shifts. In other words, the perception of impermanent bodies in space shifts.

\*

The flats perfectly reflect the mountains around them, creating jagged, milky moths in their wake. The mirage of water on their surface appears more like water than actual water. When did the idea of water become its most accurate definition? When did the idea of a body become the most accurate definition of a body, or of the passing of time? To take the entirety of the landscape in is to be driving towards a perpetually moving lake that recedes on the horizon.

\*

I want to say something affirming here about being non-binary in my gender expression, and how this identity has formed a space to be more free as a body on earth, how the impermanence of this very space might bring me closer to something like God. Although I think the word "free" is very dangerous, and lately, what I have been feeling are immense griefs. The plurality of griefs well in my lungs on the highway, until they pour into a song of uncontrollable crying. I view these sensations as a process of moving towards wholeness, of feeling sharp edges an acceptance that the emptiness (fullness) I seek is only a practice of opening to a vast number of holes over and over again. Eventually, I will open to so many holes they will fit together, creating more oxygen for my lungs. I cannot get rid of this child

crying inside of me, but I can wake them up. Waking them up from the salt sleep will occur inside the simultaneous holes; it will never occur in actualizing an idea of wholeness.

\*

In looking out the window, I think I am not reaching out to God so much as a void, which feels like a kind of unconditional love in its possibility of fullness, like the repetition of *no's* strung throughout the Heart Sūtra, a bloodline across time and space—*no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body*—Where the *no's* create holes are pools of dried salt in the valley; their negations cry out to thirst, to the formation of a life on earth.

\*

I thought all small town motels still had Bibles tucked into their nightstand drawers; this particular one does not. Luckily, I have two stashed away in the truck. One is left over from divinity school, the other belonged to my late grandmother. I sit inside the motel's cocktail lounge along Route 50, which Life Magazine called, in 1966, "the loneliest route in America." The Book of Lamentations, open on the table before me, begins: "How lonely sits the city." I stab a Maraschino cherry with the tip of my straw. The basis of this book is a touchstone lamentation. The city, personified as a woman, is wailing out to God for her newfound emptiness. The poem operates as a kind of funeral dirge for all who have been lost within its walls. It gathers them in the acrostic lines of its fingers.

\*

Sometimes I laugh and catch myself sounding like my grandmother, but it's too late to stop, so I keep laughing. That is a form of mourning, that laughter also a kind of lament. There are all kinds of laments around us we don't automatically classify as mourning. The pushing of an empty shopping cart through a supermarket, for example. The way the sound of laughter connects us in time to someone who has passed. I think a lament does not necessarily "sound" like our habitual idea of sadness, or water, or salt. For a thing to be truly heartbreaking, it is often removed from the boundary of being clearly identifiable as a static break; it turns instead into a form of dailiness, a slow thirst over time. The holding of a heavy iron teapot is a lament in its desire for boiled water. Digging a hole in the garden and planting flowers, the future necks dream of water. The thirstiest things on earth we might never even notice.

# *Our Daddy Who Art in Heaven?*

by Rain Lovegrove

One of the hardest classes I took in Bible College was called Basic Apologetics. It wasn't hard to grasp the concepts, but as a young and queer member of the evangelical movement it was hard to get excited about Pascal's Wager. I was focused on justifying my place in the Church. Christians had difficulty understanding the idea of being openly and proudly queer while also being a person of faith. My gay friends had similar questions, wondering why I would choose to associate with a community that has historically been a primary source of trauma for LGBTQ+ folks. The more I asked if there was a place for me, the louder the refrain; "why is this important to you?"

Eventually through the help of the Soulforce forums and gaychurch.org I discovered the existence of the growing Christian Left. Gay Christians, gay clergy, not needing to conform to any particular belief or ideology; it was overwhelming at first. I was taught G-d wanted me to vote Republican and have a family with a nice domestic church girl, but now I don't even have to believe in the Trinity to be a good Christian. I was an adult, and for the first time in a long time, an individual. It was up to me to figure out what I believed. Nobody was going to tell me.

I am still sorting a lot out. One thing that I often stop to reflect on is the reality that most of us with religious trauma also have family trauma. The image of G-d as Father inevitably leads us to try to understand Them by comparing our earthly father figures. My own father wasn't there much growing up, especially in my teen years when he drove truck for a living. There are worse things than being brought up by a single mother. She however remarried. Her second husband had very rigid beliefs that were considered weird even by the standards of the Religious Right. Harry Potter, The Simpsons, and celebrating Halloween were out and consistent with evangelical culture. His disdain for The Smurfs, Troll dolls, and unicorns were an outlier. Those are the things I can laugh about. I have yet to find humor in the harmful standards of masculinity enforced in the household. I have a very specific memory of my stepfather telling me about how rugged and masculine Spanish men are; how the matadors are in such control of themselves they don't show pain or weakness, how if a wounded fighter were to cry out in pain, his father would shoot him dead in shame. I have no context for where he may have heard that or why he decided he needed to share that assertion. I do know that it's incredibly difficult for me to show any kind of vulnerability to this day.

I think the thing that kept me hopeful was knowing that not all families were like mine, and not all churches had these harmful messages. I went to Bible college to get the tools I needed to forge my own path forward. The queer students had a way of finding one another, quietly. I have a particularly fond memory of our giant Dungeons and Dragons group camping out over Christmas at the bard's mother's house. That was a moment that helped settle the idea of chosen family for me. These are the people I drop my guard around. Our little island of misfit toys.

A core doctrine I took from my time as an evangelical is what we called "the priesthood of all believers", simply, the idea that just as the temple curtain was split, so has any division between G-d and creation. We have no need of an intercessor. We get to discern what a relationship with the divine looks like for ourselves. It's an ongoing dialogue, a dance. What gives fuel to our inner fire? Where does our strength come from? Who is a partner in this journey? Who is it that we can let our guard down with? These are the questions I first ask when I think about what it means to experience the divine.

Being unimpressed with my earthly parents, a heavenly surrogate didn't hold much appeal for me. A parent was somebody who didn't have the energy or time to care about what I was interested in, didn't notice that my shoes had holes in them. I had no need of a negligent and absent god. I'd had enough experience of fathers and mothers to know I was seeking neither, but that's the beauty of the scripture; there are so many ways to describe the Divine found within. They are, to borrow from Paul, all things to all people. So while I'm not interested in another Father, there's space for a Daddy. Somebody who is excited about my journey, who delights in the sparkle in my eye when I am discovering something new or babbling about the new thing I am excited about. Somebody who wants to help me to grow into the person I strive to be, who understands and comforts me when I fall short, and definitely wants to hear what I'm trying to stifle a giggle over while in polite company. Most importantly, they don't need me to believe in them all the time.

They just want me to know that they will always believe in me.

# *A Liturgy for Queer Lives*

by Mary Barber

## Litany/Call to Worship

Loving God, we are here in your presence.

*Be with us, God.*

We are Black and brown, we are female and nonbinary, we are disabled and large-bodied, we are queer.

*Be with us, God.*

We bring our full selves into this space to worship you. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, created by you in your image.

*Be with us, God.*

We are broken, and whole. We worship on stolen ground.

*Be with us, God.*

We lament for lives lost to violence and hate, especially Black trans lives.

*We lament.*

We lament for those who still must hide who they are in order to survive.

*We lament.*

We repent for the times when the queer community has chosen to align with values of whiteness and capitalism.

*We repent.*

We repent the Church's role in harming queer people, especially youth.

*We repent.*

We ask for your help, God. That LGBTQIA+ people everywhere be safe from violence, free to express ourselves, and free to love.

*Hear us, God.*

That we awaken more and more to who we are excluding, and work for justice.

*Hear us, God.*

That our communities of faith embrace and cherish people of all sexualities and genders as your children.

*Hear us, God.*

We lift up our saints and ancestors. We are here because of Pauli Murray, Bayard Rustin, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and others we now name.

(congregation names saints)

We praise and worship you in all your fullness and beauty. In the name of the One, Nonbinary, threefold God.

Amen.

Song

## You Will Hear My Pain

Sandra Montes

1. Walk - ing towards sal - va - tion. Walk - ing towards sal - va - tion.  
2. I can hear your weep - ing. I can hear your weep - ing.  
3. Ba - by, now you're sleep - ing. Ba - by, now you're sleep - ing.  
4. I will not be si - lent. I will not be si - lent.

Walk - ing towards sal - va - tion. I can - not breathe.  
I can hear your weep - ing. I am on my way.  
Ba - by, now you're sleep - ing. I will hold you close.  
I will not be si - lent. You will hear my pain.

1. Ha - cia mi res - ca - te. Ha - cia mi res - ca - te.  
2. Pue - do o - ír tu llan - to. Pue - do o - ír tu llan - to.  
3. Ya es - tás dur - mien - do. Ya es - tás dur - mien - do.  
4. No es - ta - ré en si - len - cio. No es - ta - ré en si - len - cio.

Ha - cia mi res - ca - te. No pue - do res - pi - rar.  
Pue - do o - ír tu llan - to. Voy ha - cia tí.  
Ya es - tás dur - mien - do. Te a - bra - za - ré.  
No es - ta - ré en si - len - cio. Mi do - lor e - scu - cha - rás.

First Reading Gen 16:7-14 ("You are El-Roi")

Second Reading

*Memo in Bronze* (Pauli Murray)

*(from Dark Testament and Other Poems)*

For this I love you most

Bent to your cross

You stagger up the unending hill

You turn to lift my load

And bless me with a smile

So crossed with pain

That were my heart stilled

It would throb and beat again

Gospel Reading Luke 1:46-55 (Magnificat)

Reflection/Sermon

Song *The Lord is my Light* (Lillian Bouknight) or *Brighter* (Doe) or *I am Light* (India Arie). *One of the songs not used here could be a recessional song.*

*Congregation is invited to move/dance to this song as it is played/sung.*

Blessing

May the God of seeing who sees you fill your days with wonder and love. May you feel your belovedness deep in your body and soul. And may the blessing of God, Parent, Child, and Queer Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always.

Dismissal

Go in joy and strength to love God and each other.

*Thanks be to God.*

## *Be Possessed*

by Nordia Bennett

You say there is an evil spirit inside me that must be exorcised.  
My response to you is that you are correct.  
The Spirit of inauthenticity.  
The Spirit of fear.  
The Spirit of daring not to be powerful.  
The Spirit of self-hate.  
The Spirit of lack of self-esteem.  
The Spirit of not loving my curves, thighs, and thickness.  
The Spirit that drives me so far from my true self I scream because that person I'm in bed with hates me, despises me, and doesn't trust me.  
I roll over looking her dead in the eyes and only see death, sadness, and hurt.  
The evil that resides contorts, manipulates, and seizes all voluntary control she wished she possessed but allows fear to consume her.  
The evil spirit you speak of burns of wasted flesh because the space I take up is pointless.  
I wear a mask that feeds the evil spirit all that it needs to prosper.  
It needs lies.  
The lies I tell myself at night because evil has a funny way of looking more comfortable and more home than freedom.  
Freedom became the darkness I dreamt of.  
The evil eats away at the darkness feeding my insecurities more and more.  
Freedom is the lie evil told me.  
I crumble to freedom.  
I am lost for words— speechless of shall I say helpless.  
The evil you speak of inside me made a home and it's me.  
The evil inside me creeps waiting for freedom to knock at my door, but instead I did not recognize it.  
Freedom called and I declined.  
For I scream to the top of my lungs but evil has a way of molding illusions. I saw freedom, but instead I was dragged and forced to drown in the tears of my broken dreams.  
The dream of one day being free.  
This evil has a name.  
This evil you speak of— queer  
Queerness  
My queerness is the evil you speak of.  
All I can say is thank you for you have named the thing that has set me free.  
Inauthenticity is afraid of authenticity. It is afraid of queerness.  
We will name the evil spirit and release it into the world for all to see and be blessed by the spirit that overcame me and introduced me to an alternative way of living that is blessed and true.  
Set me free to see me for the first time in a long time.  
So call that spirit forth. It will be happy you did.



I sure enough am.  
My queerness stands tall— unchecked and unfiltered.  
Freedom called.  
Queerness called.  
And this time I answered.