

# Liturgy and the *Missio Dei*: A Response

Joseph S. Pagano and Amy E. Richter

From 2018 until March of 2020 and the closing down of borders all over the world due to Covid-19, we had the privilege of serving on behalf of The Episcopal Church with our partners in mission in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. During our first year, we lived and served at the College of the Transfiguration in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape. In our second year, we were in KwaZulu-Natal as visiting academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. In both locations, we took great pleasure in participating in worship, with the College of the Transfiguration, with the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. George's in Makhanda, with the Church of the Ascension in Hilton, and with various church communities when we travelled.

Part of the pleasure came from worship that was clearly both Anglican and Southern African. For us the mix of the familiar (Anglican) and unfamiliar, mainly in the various languages used in worship and the variety of music, hymnody, and choruses, was energizing, engaging, decentering (a helpful reminder that we worship a God who is other as well as immanent), and often beautiful. Images and sounds we won't soon forget: huge leafy palms on Palm Sunday that had been cut locally (rather than thin, single palm fronds wrapped in cellophane that have to be ordered months in advance from a church supply company); the *Gloria* played by the marimba band in the cathedral; how we could identify students' home languages when they were used in chapel worship, and otherwise quiet students who would sing a hymn at the top of their voices; manual gestures during the Eucharist becoming signifiers and ways to participate even when we don't have the words or know them.

The label "Anglican" identifies a broad range of experiences and expressions, envelops them, and announces them as a place in which we belong, a home even when far from home. For us, as guests—participants who belonged and were at home even though we weren't in our more familiar roles as parish priests in the United States (and now Canada)—the mixture of the known-by-heart and the novel-to-us served as a reminder that to worship is no less than to be caught up in the mission of God, to be again and again re-oriented to the *missio dei*, and to be equipped to participate in God's mission.

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Joseph S. Pagano (Ph.D.) and Amy E. Richter (Ph.D.) are Episcopal priests, canonically resident in the Diocese of Maryland (USA), currently serving in the Anglican Parish of Pasadena and Cormack in Newfoundland, Canada. They are also on the faculty of Queen's College in Newfoundland.