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Rituals of Disarticulation: Literate Activity, Social Concerns, and the Progressive Church

Taken from a larger body of ethnographic data gathered at two Protestant churches that describe themselves as progressive, this talk focuses on participants writing religious rituals. The compositions specifically deal with social concerns that participants at one of the sites identified as important: sexual assault awareness and racial disparities within the criminal justice system. These rituals were composed collaboratively and enacted multimodally, mixing the voices and ideas of laypeople and ordained clergy, officially published texts and side conversations between group members. I argue that religious rituals should be thought of as complex and evolving genres rather than how they are currently portrayed in the field as literalist, static, and rote. Further, taking up Sharon Crowley’s call to examine how religious rhetors might actually work to be in productive civil dialogue, I argue that these rituals serve as important sites of that work. These participants take on the hard, but not impossible, work of taking apart old connections and forging new ones through these multimodal compositions.