I. Original Intentions
My initial intention, stated in my sabbatical application, was to pursue two different projects over the course of my year-long sabbatical. I had intended to spend the fall working at the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship (CICW) on research on the visual arts in the worshipping church, and to spend the spring term in the Netherlands pursing my “Natural History” project. As is often the case, the best laid plans are vulnerable to considerable change. In my case, changes stemmed from both internal and external circumstances.

II. Fall 2006
The fall was spent, as planned, working on my research project for CICW. I began by reviewing the research and interviews I’d conducted up to that point, and reading all the “worship renewal grant” files that concerned the visual arts. This concentrated review of my material, plus the information gleaned from the grant reports, led to some disconcerting but useful realizations. Over the previous two years, I had worked to establish a list of churches across the nation that were identified by their own denominations or associations as doing excellent and fitting work with the visual arts. I was hoping to have 8-10 churches from each of a representative selection of confessional traditions that I could survey, and from this, choose 6-8 churches as “case-study” churches for in-depth interviews. I had even garnered funding to conduct surveys with the help of the Calvin Center for Social Research. After reviewing my accumulated findings, however, I came to the following conclusions:

1) The visual arts are generally invisible in most denominational hierarchies, even though they may be well represented at their seminaries, as is the case with the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ. While a denomination may have an office of “Liturgy and Music” or “Worship Arts,” those in that office may have very little idea of what their churches are doing with the visual arts.

2) Knowledge of what is happening with the arts in a denomination or association of churches is typically known only by informal groups of people within those denominations. Even denominations with an arts group (ECVA; Grünewald Guild) do not necessarily have good knowledge of which churches are doing consistently good work.

3) Local criteria for what constitutes “excellent and fitting” work within a particular communion are generally lacking. Simply being active in the arts does not necessarily mean that a particular congregation’s work is “excellent and fitting.” In general, I was pointed to churches that were merely “doing something” with the arts. If or why that work was deemed excellent and fitting was difficult to determine.

4) Visual arts groups, programs, and projects in churches are extremely fragile. In several many I was pointed to churches that were no longer working with the arts, generally because a key artist or supportive pastor had left the church. In several cases where I had begun preliminary work with a case-study congregation, their arts programs stopped or were totally re-directed by the time I was ready to conduct surveys.
Trying to develop and maintain contact with communities across the country without adequate face-to-face contact and without reliable access to local, informal networks was preventing me from building and maintaining a stable group of churches with which to work. All of this convinced me that working on a national scale was counter-productive, and that the project so envisioned was, sadly, at this point in the life of the church, likely to end up as “garbage in, garbage out.”

Happily, I was also discovering through conversations with churches in West Michigan, and through reading all of the “Worship Renewal Grant” files, that the kinds of arts projects and ministries that I was encountering in my national correspondence could all be found much closer to home, in the greater Grand Rapids area. The advantages to a smaller focus were clear: much easier access to people and local networks of knowledge; ability to discern the extent to which these churches are educating and influencing one another; ability to incorporate more organically the Orthodox and Catholic congregations in the area; ability to take into account the presence of para-church institutions and their role in helping churches think about the role of the visual arts (e.g. Manna and Eykons). Thus, the upshot of my fall work was the complete re-design of my project. On the basis of my new design, I began identifying possible congregations to use, identifying and interviewing the relevant people in those churches, and doing the new background research necessary for this new approach.

Recognizing that I had made little progress on my new research design, I decided at that point to request an extension of my stay at CICW in order to make further progress on this project.

During the fall, I also wrote three conference papers and one book review:

- Review of Robin Jensen’s *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine In Early Christianity* in *Material Religion* forthcoming
- “News and Good News: Kairos and Chronos at work in Communion” for the Historians of Netherlandish Art sponsored Session at College Art Association, 2007
- “Worshiping with U2: What we Imagine about Worship and Art” Lilly/Pruit Conference on the Christian Imagination, Baylor University, October 2006

**III. Spring 2007**

I had already decided to postpone my research in the Netherlands to the future when my father was unexpectedly hospitalized for heart surgery. He had six bypasses on December 21. Because my family lives close to Grand Rapids, I was able to stay with my parents and be useful during this time. I’m very grateful to have been able to be close and helpful during my dad’s surgery and recovery, even though that was not, initially, the reason I decided not to leave the country.

During the spring, I researched, interviewed, and wrote three chapters toward a book to be entitled *Whose Art? Which Church?: Mapping the Terrain of the Visual Arts in the Worshipping Church*. This book is intended to function as a topographical map, delineating the contours of the conversation on the visual arts in the worshiping church by describing the larger institutional
and social structures that shape our underlying assumptions. The goal is to help make those underlying and largely hidden structures visible by interleaving historical, theological and sociological analysis with descriptions of very tangible arts activities in specific worshipping communities here in the greater Grand Rapids area. This book will be published by Eerdmans under the auspices of the Worship Institute.

During the spring, I also wrote one conference paper, one critical essay, and one article for *Reformed Worship*.

- “Baptism and Balance” 2007 Lilly Fellows Reunion Conference, Indianapolis, IN June 2007

IV. Other Highlights

- Living, during the fall, with a college friend and her family, whose house is right next to Calvin’s campus.
- Living, during the spring and summer, with my parents, and commuting to Calvin every day with an immensely congenial professor from Calvin’s philosophy department.
- Attending the 2007 Worship Symposium, and also getting a great “behind the scenes” experience.
- Traveling to Little Rock AR to visit close friends and see the Clinton Library and Museum, where my friend is curator.
- Hearing Bruce Cockburn and Angela Hewitt live, in concert (but sadly, not together)
- Re-connecting with a young woman who is now a first-year Calvin student, but who was a newborn when I babysat her in graduate school.
- Enjoying a huge office on the fourth floor of Calvin’s library (the theological section)
- Enjoying the great hospitality of everyone at CICW and at the Nagel Institute (who provided my office space and the coffee)
- Visiting the Emeritorium with my “new” 1597 edition of Aurelius’ *Divisiekronyck*
- Reconnecting with many people in the church in which I grew up
- Enjoying a full turn of the seasons on the Lake Michigan shoreline
- Discovering that I can, in fact, live quite happily as a hermit

V. Special Thanks

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