Negotiating Liturgical Space Through Receptive Ecumenism

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Introduction

Each Christian tradition—not to mention each of the local congregations within a single tradition—maintains a unique and evolving relationship with liturgical space. Even when unacknowledged or downplayed, liturgical space shapes the identity of a worshipping community, often through the mediating force of liturgical action.[1] The space can determine what happens and what holds meaning in worship, which then shapes what congregants believe about God and themselves.[2] Running against this current, congregants might alter their liturgical space in ways that enable a particular action and thus reinforce a particular belief.

Establishing a link between liturgical space and identity (Figure 1) has led some scholars to take an additional step of exploring what happens when extraneous circumstances alter or exacerbate this relationship (Figure 2). For instance, what happens when a congregation closes its doors for financial reasons and must then grieve the loss of their liturgical space?[3] How do congregations adapt to sharing

1. Hansol Goo uses the example of Catholic immigrant communities obtaining their own liturgical space to argue that "a physical building augments the community's self-understanding" and increases their sense of autonomy. See Hansol Goo, "From Division to Encounter: Spatial Considerations for Hospitality in Shared Parishes," *Liturgy* 39:3–4 (2024): 95, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2024.2369024.
2. Note that in establishing this relationship between liturgical space and identity, which is subject to constructions of power and authority in any given context, I am taking what Jeanne Halgren Kilde calls a "socio-historical" approach to studying liturgical space. For an overview of this approach and examples of how it has appeared in scholarly discourse up to the time of her writing in 2013, see Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "Approaching Religious Space: An Overview of Theories, Methods, and Challenges in Religious Studies," *Religion & Theology* 20:3–4 (September 2013): 188–93, https://doi.org/10.1163/15743012-12341258.
3. See, for instance, Henk de Roest, "'Losing a Common Space to Connect': An Inquiry into Inside Perspectives on Church Closure Using Visual Methods," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17:2 (2013): 292–313, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2013-0018; Jennifer Clark, "'This Special Shell': The Church Building and the Embodiment of Memory," *Journal of Religious History* 31:1 (2007): 59–77, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2007.00545.x.

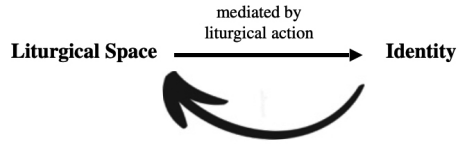

Figure 1. Relationship between liturgical space and identity.

Figure 2. Relationship between liturgical space and identity altered by extraneous circumstances.

space with other communities, Christian or non-Christian, so that more than one identity is represented in the space? In other words, liturgical space can change over time, often through unconventional circumstances that facilitate encounters with more or less authoritative people and perspectives. Building upon these examples, this paper marks the first step of an ongoing qualitative study of "ecumenical shared ministries" as an understudied crisis of liturgical space. An ecumenical shared ministry refers to two or more congregations merging resources while retaining their distinct denominational affiliations, resulting in "receptive ecumenism" at the local level.[4] Receptive ecumenism is often imagined as "a dialogue that prioritizes an ecumenical exchange of gifts over the weighing of different doctrinal positions."[5] However, it entails more than abstract *conversation* between two Christian traditions; it requires a willingness to *change* in tangible ways that deepen one's own sense of denominational identity while also fostering a shared sense of identity that transcends denominational labels.[6] For the purposes

4. See Sandra Beardsall, Mitzi J. Budde, and William P. McDonald, *Daring to Share: Multi-Denominational Congregations in the United States and Canada* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018). Note that I use "ecumenical shared ministries" instead of "multi-denominational congregations" in the remaining sections of this paper, since the former term is more frequently heard in the Canadian context of my chosen case studies. See Beardsall, Budde, and McDonald, 3.
5. Kimberly Hope Belcher, *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism: From Thanksgiving to Communion* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2.
6. Paul D. Murray summarizes the effectual character of receptive ecumenism in a singular question: "'What, in any given situation, can one's own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?'" Paul D. Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7:4 (November 2007): 288, https://doi.org/10.1080/14742250701725785. For her part, Belcher takes a "ritual-praxical" approach to receptive ecumenism, prioritizing "pastoral needs" and their tangible expression in worship instead of "systematic curiosity about the interrelationship between disparate theological claims." I follow her approach in this paper, even as we both acknowledge that "ritual differences are often more challenging to reconcile than scholarly language." See Belcher, *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism*, 2.

of this paper, receptive ecumenism manifests as making decisions about liturgical space that are informed by ecumenical relationships.[7]

The formation of an ecumenical shared ministry is an exemplary case of enacting receptive ecumenism in a way that implicates liturgical space. This paper therefore moves from a review of existing scholarship on the relationship between liturgical space and identity, culminating with Hansol Goo's study of negotiating liturgical space in "shared parishes," to an analysis of how two different ecumenical shared ministries in Canada have negotiated liturgical space according to their websites.[8] First, taking Pinawa Christian Fellowship in Pinawa, Manitoba as an example, I consider how ecumenical shared ministries may downplay the significance of liturgical space for the sake of minimizing conflict as they build a shared sense of identity. Second, I consider how the Church of St. Paul in Barriere, British Columbia has sought ways to honour multiple identities in a space that formerly represented only one of its three participating denominations. I argue that there are merits and drawbacks to each approach in terms of how well they equip these communities to enact receptive ecumenism by receiving the best of each other's traditions.

Liturgical Space in Crisis: COVID-19, Congregational Closures, and Shared Parishes

As a site of liturgical action, liturgical space becomes a marker and shaper of identity for any worshipping community.[9] The COVID-19 pandemic has offered opportunities to further explore this phenomenon, since it forced many congregations to relocate to an online space for weekly services instead of the physical building where they would typically gather. For instance, reasoning that "the sudden loss of access to churches must have made many reflect on the place of such buildings in their life of faith," Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis distributed a quantitative survey to facilitate and record these reflections, among others, from

7. In this way, I follow the logic of E. Byron (Ron) Anderson, who believes that receptive ecumenism should materialize as worshipping together on a regular basis, presumably in a shared space. See E. Byron (Ron) Anderson, "'Together Met, Together Bound': Liturgy and Ecumenism," *Studia Liturgica* 54:1 (March 2024): 17, https://doi.org/10.1177/00393207231225978.
8. Note that in consulting the websites of two ecumenical shared ministries, I follow the work of other scholars who have employed this same analytical method to ask and answer questions of ecclesial identity at the local level. See, for instance, Lynne M. Baab, "The Future Church: Identity and Persuasion on Congregational Websites" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2007); Philipp Bartholomä, "Digital Expressions of Church: The Online Identity of Free Churches as a Mirror of Their Missional Mentality," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 47:1 (January 2023): 41–56.
9. Consider, for instance, how many Mennonite places of worship are distinguished from other church buildings on the basis of their "architectural humility," whereas Anglican scholar William Whyte's "theology of architecture" recognizes architecture as a "tool for spiritual development." See John L. Ruth, *The Earth Is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 39 (Herald Press, 2001), 549; William Whyte, "The Ethics of the Empty Church: Anglicanism's Need for a Theology of Architecture," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 13:2 (November 2015): 172–88, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355315000108.

over 6000 congregants across different branches of the Church of England, as well as some Roman Catholic and Free Church participants.[10] Village and Francis report a diverse range of responses to the sections of the survey that asked participants to rank the value of church buildings for Christian identity and witness. Further, they argue that the responses correlate with denominational affiliation:

> [With] a high score indicating someone who attached strong significance to the importance of church buildings for faith…differences among Christian faith traditional groups were slightly more pronounced, and in directions that reflected historical and theological traditions. Thus, Roman- and Anglo- Catholics scored the highest, Free Church and Anglican Evangelicals the lowest, and Broad-Church Anglicans in between the other traditions.[11]

On one hand, their findings suggest a modest affirmation of church buildings overall, regardless of Christian tradition. On the other hand, there is enough *range* in the level of agreement with each building-related statement on the survey to suggest that the iconoclastic debates of the Reformation era continue to foster differences between traditions.[12] These differences are relatively inconsequential as long as Christians continue to worship in denomination-specific buildings, but as recent scholarship reveals, congregations increasingly cannot afford this luxury.

COVID-19 is one example of a crisis of liturgical space, but it is far from anomalous. Many Christian traditions in the West are experiencing significant decline, fostering a sense of "redundancy" and resulting in congregational mergers and closures.[13] For these congregations, the loss or adaptation of liturgical *space* as a container of individual and communal memories threatens their sense of identity. Focusing on congregational closures within the Uniting Church in Australia, Jennifer Clark explains that

> if the church building existed to prompt religious memory, internally for the believer and externally for the community, the lived history of the church, as the ongoing relationship between the congregation and the building, between people and place, creates another memory platform—congregational memory…The essence of congregational identity is an association of individuals with each other in a known place, usually a particular church building. Outside the building a congregation is without physical definition. Memory connects the building with the congregation over time and through generations.[14]

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10. Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis, "Churches and Faith: Attitude Towards Church Buildings During the 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown Among Churchgoers in England," *Ecclesial Practices* 8 (December 2021): 217, https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-bja10025.
11. Village and Francis, 227–28.
12. The controversies of the Reformation era also perpetuate divisive perspectives on liturgical space *within* denominations if one takes Village and Francis' approach of accounting for the differences between "Anglo-Catholics," "Broad Church Anglicans," and "Anglican Evangelicals." See Village and Francis, 230.
13. See Denise Bonnette, *Redundancy, Community and Heritage in the Modern Church of England, 1945–2000: Closing the Church Door* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023).
14. Clark, "'This Special Shell,'" 62–63.

In the context of a congregational closure, perspectives on liturgical space, which are mediated by the convergence of diverse "religious, congregational, personal, and community memor[ies]" in each individual, must rise to the surface instead of remaining unspoken, which can incite conflict.[15] Much of what defined the congregation in the past is called into question when they look towards the future, sparking a defensive and panic-like reaction that may set congregants at odds with each other instead of bringing them into closer communion.

Clark's research on the loss of liturgical space may be transferable to instances of sharing liturgical space. After all, if conflict is an inevitable outcome of a building closure involving a *single* congregation, it seems unlikely that *multiple* congregations could worship in the same building in a way that promotes "unity and peace in societies broken apart by polarization."[16] Indeed, Hansol Goo's study of shared Catholic parishes in the United States reveals how "space and spatiality [can] emerge as central impediments to unity" because "communities that share [a] parish must negotiate space and time in a precarious act of balancing authority, power, and agency."[17] For instance, she describes a parish where majority-Hispanic and Korean Catholic communities worship at different times and in different buildings on the same property. In taking this approach, both congregations can claim autonomy over their worship spaces and authentically express themselves. They can avoid power struggles that come with negotiating some of the finer points of shared space, such as "decoration, arrangement of the furnishings and audio equipment in the worship space, or display of the community's devotional statues and images."[18] At the same time, Goo laments that in the case of a shared Catholic parish, "members of each community are insulated within their ethnic group and do not interact with others outside of their group. Like oil and water, ethnically distinct communities within the same parish do not mix and they exist in parallel worlds that do not cross."[19]

To be sure, Goo does not describe sharing liturgical space as an exclusively divisive ordeal. She also believes that liturgical space "contains the possibility for

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15. Clark, 69.
16. Richard S. Vosko expresses this hope for single congregations negotiating the relationship between clergy and laity in a given liturgical space, but it is also a desirable aim for multiple congregations sharing the same space. See Richard S. Vosko, *Art and Architecture for Congregational Worship: The Search for a Common Ground* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2019), 3.
17. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 96.
18. Goo, 94.
19. Goo, 94. One could make the same assessment of shared space in ecumenical or interfaith contexts, such as the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center (used by both Catholic and Protestant communities) in Maryland or multifaith chapels on university campuses. See Catherine R. Osborne, "'So That One Day We May Be One': The Interfaith Center at Columbia, Maryland," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 35: 3 (2017): 75–104; Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "Creating the Multifaith Chapel, 1938–1955: Architecture and the Changing Understanding of 'Religion,'" *Religions* 15:3 (February 2024): 275, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030275.

unity between two disjointed parties." She views space as an essential and underutilized resource for encountering God and others:

> Space is essential for liturgy because space facilitates the sensorial experience of liturgy, which is a theological and anthropological phenomenon concerned with the purpose of life and the eschatological end for human beings. More than a mere architectural background for liturgy, parish space is an existential space in which the theological truths of liturgy are realized as concrete experience for the individual and for the worshiping community.[20]

In other words, Goo affirms as one of the central arguments of this paper that liturgical space, as a site of liturgical action, shapes what congregants believe about God and each other. Goo then follows this argument to its logical conclusion by suggesting that as liturgical space changes over time to suit the liturgical needs of "all communities that worship there," especially on occasions when everyone worships together, such as a joint liturgy for a major feast day like Christmas or Easter, congregants can experience "mutual growth and enrichment in understanding each other."[21] Over time, rather than separating congregants into discrete rooms or identities that never overlap, sharing liturgical space facilitates encounters with difference and thus becomes an exercise in receptive ecumenism. How might these reflections inform a study of ecumenical shared ministries with members who worship together not just on special occasions, but on a *regular* basis while representing different denominations and, by extension, different perspectives on liturgical space?

Negotiating Liturgical Space: Lessons from Ecumenical Shared Ministries

By worshipping as one community not solely for Christmas and Easter, but each and every week, ecumenical shared ministries are realizing a mode of ecumenism that E. Byron (Ron) Anderson calls "believing and praying together":

> If we believe…that our liturgical practices form us in belief and understanding, even as they have the potential to "deform" us, then we should also be able to believe that regular practices of common worship, the inhabiting of shared liturgical patterns and practices…can lead us to and help us embody common beliefs.[22]

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20. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 97. Horst Schwebel also grapples with the inevitable infringement of anthropological concerns upon theological thinking, concluding that "theological debate on the subject of church and world, parish, worship, and so on, needs—for love's sake—to be complemented by an anthropological debate in which the relationship of humanity to space is given the status and treatment it deserves." See Horst Schwebel, "Liturgical Space and Human Experience, Exemplified by the Issue of the 'Multi-Purpose' Church Building," *Studia Liturgica* 24:1 (March 1, 1994): 20, https://doi.org/10.1177/003932079402400102.
21. Goo, 96.
22. Anderson, 17.

Without eliminating differences or prescribing uniformity across traditions, Anderson takes a cue from Kimberly Hope Belcher and other proponents of receptive ecumenism to explain how believing and praying together should not dilute, but rather enrich each tradition: "We receive each other's traditions as part of a shared heritage…[This] requires not that we be indifferent to one another but that we be more generous and big-hearted with one another. Such generosity enables us to see the good in each other's practices."[23] Within this description of receptive ecumenism, there is an affirmation of each tradition that fosters a willingness to refine one's own identity through encountering other identities, much like how Goo believes that shared liturgical space can serve as a site of hospitable encounter with God and other humans. One must also ask, however, if this receptive engagement with each other's traditions is as straightforward as it sounds. Congregations make enormous ecumenical strides when they commit to regularly worshipping together, but each of them brings a unique set of memories rooted in tangible realities (like a building, for instance), which can become something to defend rather than share at the risk of losing their sense of identity.[24] Division looms large even as congregations commit to the work of encountering each other. What strategies do congregations thus employ to reduce conflict and promote receptive ecumenism, and what are the merits and drawbacks of their efforts?

Downplaying Liturgical Space: Pinawa Christian Fellowship

When a congregational closure results in the loss of a building, Clark notes how it is common for leaders to dilute liturgical space of its meaning:

> In order to advocate closure[,] church authorities must distance themselves from the building and deny the importance of place in theological terms, arguing that Christianity does not invest significance in the building itself…The true theological meaning of the 'church' is the people.[25]

This rhetoric works to trivialize the building and the memories that it holds for congregants so that their vision of a collective future can take shape without being challenged by individual perspectives on the past.[26] On one hand, as Clark acknowledges, this approach to handling the loss of liturgical space is a "substantive theological position."[27] After all, "congregations see themselves as belonging to a national church [or] to the wider community of believers, the people of God, that is, the church in a theological sense, geographically and physically boundary

23. Anderson, 18–19. See also Belcher, *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism*.
24. Clark, "This Special Shell," 70.
25. Clark, 71–72.
26. Henk de Roest takes note of the same rhetoric in his work with a Dutch congregation on the verge of closure: "The aim of church authorities…is to loosen the ties foe congregation, individuals, or community has to a specific church building." See de Roest, "'Losing a Common Space to Connect,'" 311.
27. Clark, 72.

free."[28] On the other hand, this approach is dismissive and avoidant of the reality that "the essence of congregational identity is an association of individuals with each other in a known place, usually a particular church building."[29] In the case of Pinawa Christian Fellowship (PCF), a longstanding ecumenical shared ministry located just northeast of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the merits of this approach outweigh the drawbacks. PCF formed in 1963 through a union of Christians with no single denominational affiliation when the town of Pinawa was itself beginning to form.[30] Today, the congregation maintains formal ties to Anglican, Mennonite, Presbyterian, and United denominations in Canada while worshipping in a Lutheran building.[31]

Unlike the situation of many other ecumenical shared ministries of choosing between existing buildings that have served as longstanding places of worship for different proportions of congregants, PCF experienced no strain in this regard because there were no churches in Pinawa before its own inception. Christians of various traditions were moving to the region for the first time, thus requiring them to leave all attachments to physical buildings behind and begin anew with an ecumenical mindset. Upon visiting the community's website, then, one detects a note of pride in the statement that "the PCF has served the community of Pinawa for nearly sixty years now without a church building. We have invested in people and community rather than in property, renting space for all our needs."[32] The rationale for renting a building instead of claiming ownership to their own space is more or less identical to the expression that "the 'church' is the people."[33] Moreover, choosing to worship in a space that is familiar to no one, beginning with an elementary school and then transitioning to a Lutheran building, has a neutralizing effect so that no members of the ecumenical shared ministry may cite an advantage over the others.[34] Everyone worships on equal footing so that everyone, at least in theory, equally contributes to the development of a shared identity.

PCF's approach to negotiating liturgical space is a deliberate choice that stands in contrast to other options, such as the construction of a new building with a spatial design that could integrate all of the memories and values that congregants might bring from their respective denominations. However, PCF has not remained as steadfast on this point as what a surface-level analysis of their website might

28. Clark, 63.
29. Clark, 63.
30. "Our Story," The Pinawa Christian Fellowship: Called Together, accessed December 9, 2024, https://pinawa.church/?page_id=52.
31. "Our Story."
32. "Our Story."
33. Clark, "This Special Shell," 72.
34. See Sim Stroes-Gascoyne, ed., *Called Together: 50 Years of the Pinawa Christian Fellowship; 1963–2013* (Pinawa Christian Fellowship, 2013), 3–4, https://pinawa.church/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CalledTogether50YearsofthePinawaChristianFellowship_.pdf.

suggest. Taking a closer look at a document tracing the history of their first 50 years together evinces an *evolving* relationship to liturgical space over the years. Beginning with an excerpt from a 1984 church document, it seems that PCF first

> firmly rejected the proposed construction of a church building; theological conviction about the church's existence as the 'gathering together' of believers is strong and deep-running. Free from the millstones of buildings and property, the PCF has always been both self-sufficient and an active contributor to the mission treasuries of our denominations.[35]

The tides shifted by the 1992, when

> a PCF General Meeting voted overwhelmingly to buy a lot of land across from the Pinawa Shopping Centre parking lot…A Building Committee was established to investigate church buildings. One option which received serious attention was to purchase an available building and have it moved to Pinawa, but this did not come to pass… The committee also visited several nearby church buildings to get ideas on current construction concepts, etc. A designer was contracted to design a building.[36]

Cross-referencing these accounts with the minutes of a congregational meeting in 2023 reveals that PCF never acted upon the intention to construct a building, instead transitioning to renting Pinawa Lutheran Church for their weekly liturgies. Moreover, their meeting minutes reflect a shift away from the firmly theological impetus for renting a building in favour of a more economic rationale: "[The] cost of [the] Lutheran Church is the most favourable and falls within our budget."[37] At various times over the years, then, PCF has struggled to hold competing priorities relating to liturgical space in a balance, and at every stage, they have ultimately opted to downplay the material aspects of their shared liturgical life.

If we recall the role of liturgical space in shaping identity, PCF's indifference to where they choose to worship may reduce the level of threat posed by receptive ecumenism. If the liturgical space does not belong to any members of the worshipping community, it no longer plays such a central role in differentiating the denominations represented within it. Where identities are less visibly distinct, receptive ecumenism is a far less risky endeavour because congregants see themselves as already converging rather than needing to traverse a significant distance to receive the gifts of each other's traditions. At the same time, to deny that liturgical space holds meaning is to upset the container that holds so much of a congregation's identity, especially in view of Goo's contention that "space is *not* neutral; it is charged with meaning…Through spatiality one can tangibly encounter the

35. Stroes-Gascoyne, 13.
36. Stroes-Gascoyne, 13.
37. Pinawa Christian Fellowship, "Special Congregational Meeting: To Discuss a Rental Agreement with Pinawa Lutheran Church," June 18, 2023, accessed December 9, 2024, 1, https://pinawa.church/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2023-June-18-General-Meeting-MINUTES.pdf.

reality of the other, making the existence and knowledge of the other concretely present."[38] As much as PCF celebrates richer encounters with diverse people and traditions as a product of deemphasizing liturgical space, has this ecumenical shared ministry undermined its own intentions by reducing what each tradition can offer to a non-material scope?

Honouring Liturgical Space: Church of St. Paul

There is much to both affirm and question when considering how PCF engages with liturgical space. On one hand, PCF takes an approach that makes receptive ecumenism as reciprocal as possible. By encouraging an attitude of indifference towards liturgical space, this ecumenical shared ministry ensures that liturgical space does not become a source of conflict that could lead one tradition to assert dominance over the others, especially if they began a process of choosing between buildings or developing a spatial design for a newly shared space. On the other hand, PCF arguably cheapens receptive ecumenism when congregants fail to receive the full scope of each other's traditions through their shared worship. The Church of St. Paul (COSP), on the other hand, has taken a somewhat opposite approach to negotiating liturgical space and thus warrants a comparative analysis.

Located in the municipality of Barriere in British Columbia, COSP brought together Anglican, Lutheran, and United congregations as an ecumenical shared ministry in 2010.[39] Unlike PCF, each of these congregations worshipped in their own building for many years before COSP formed. Further, instead of seeking a relatively neutral space to begin their life together, COSP made the decision to worship in a building that was formerly owned by one of their participating congregations: Barriere United Church. Their website alludes to the complexities of transitioning into this shared space while knowing that congregants would retain different degrees of attachment to it and other buildings. In fact, COSP dedicates an entire page of their website to honouring the Anglican building known as "Church of the Redeemer" that was lost in the process of amalgamation.[40] Contrary to the assertion that "the 'church' is the people," this webpage refers to the now-secularized building with reverence.[41] It recounts the initial steps taken to construct the building, and it features both exterior and interior shots of the space. It further notes that

38. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 96. Emphasis added.
39. See "Church of St. Paul, Barriere," North Thompson Ecumenical Shared Ministry: Church of St. Paul (Barriere) and Trinity Shared Ministry (Clearwater), accessed December 9, 2024, https://norththompsonpc.ca/st-paul-barriere/.
40. See "Church of the Redeemer," North Thompson Ecumenical Shared Ministry: Church of St. Paul (Barriere) and Trinity Shared Ministry (Clearwater), accessed December 9, 2024, https://norththompsonpc.ca/st-paul-barriere/church-of-the-redeemer/.
41. Clark, "This Special Shell," 72.

> when the decision to form an Ecumenical Shared Ministry was made, it was also decided that the Barriere United Church would become its home and the Church of the Redeemer would be sold. However, there are reminders of the Church of the Redeemer in the Church of St Paul. Many items, including the pews, communion table, and hangings were moved and are in use each week. As well, the stained glass windows were removed, framed and lit, and hung in the sanctuary of the Church of St Paul.[42]

This approach to negotiating liturgical space is markedly different from what PCF describes, and it comes closer to what Goo recommends when she writes of "reconfiguring the worship space to accommodate culturally diverse ritual practices."[43] Still, there are both merits and drawbacks that come with this recognition of lost or adapted liturgical space. On one hand, COSP explicitly affirms "the indispensability of space in practicing hospitality" and demonstrating how different identities can visibly coexist and even complement each other in a shared space.[44] There is a clear effort to honour remnants of a building that meant so much to the Anglican members of the community while worshipping in a liturgical space that elicits memories for those who affiliate with the United Church of Canada. There is an opportunity for each participating congregation to exercise autonomy in the liturgical space, making their own unique contribution in service to an ecumenical agenda. Congregants offer something from their own tradition, and for the ecumenical shared ministry to then succeed in the long term, each of them likewise demonstrates a willingness to receive from others.

While COSP seems to dive headfirst into the riches of receptive ecumenism by celebrating the different liturgical spaces that shaped their congregants up to the point of forming an ecumenical shared ministry, there are also complications that come with this decision. Most significantly, COSP gathers in a space with a history for some, but not all, congregants, thus setting a select group at a liturgical advantage. Former members of Barriere United Church have been making decisions for decades in the space where COSP now worships, and those decisions presumably reflect and reinforce their identity more so than Anglican or Lutheran perspectives despite their current ecumenical situation. It is difficult to undo the force of an existing identity in a space, even if there is evidence on the COSP website of making room for Anglican identity through visual reminders of the Church of the Redeemer building. While Goo optimistically suggests that "the members of all sharing communities could make the worship space a common home that

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42. "Church of the Redeemer."
43. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 99. It is also similar to de Roest's promising work with a Dutch congregation on the verge of closure. De Roest explains how he assisted the congregation with marking the loss of their building by inviting members to reflect on photos of the space that held meaning for them. See de Roest, "'Losing a Common Space to Connect,'" 299–302. For a more fulsome description of conducting qualitative research through visual means, see Sarah Dunlop, *Doing Theology with Photographs* (London: T&T Clark, 2024).
44. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 98.

belongs to all by relying on the power of space to physically facilitate the diverse cultural expressions of each sharing community," a liturgical space does not necessarily distribute power to everyone in equal measure.[45]

When ecumenical shared ministries take the approach of adapting a space that is familiar to one congregation for use by all of the participating congregations, they inevitably find themselves managing power discrepancies. Moreover, as soon as ecumenical shared ministries acknowledge the value of liturgical space for their representative traditions, they must manage the *discrepancies* in the value assigned to liturgical space from one tradition to the next. Much like how Village and Francis conclude that attachment to church buildings depends in part on one's denominational affiliation, we see in the example of COSP that the link between liturgical space and identity is explicit enough in the Anglican tradition to warrant a service of "deconsecration" for Church of the Redeemer and a reintegration of some salvaged materials into their worship.[46] In contrast, there is no description on the website of what elements of the liturgical space uniquely represent the United Church of Canada, although the building itself was originally designed for United Church of Canada use. Furthermore, the Lutheran constituency receives no mention whatsoever on the website in relation to liturgical space.[47] What sort of invisible assumptions about the authority of each tradition form through the visual recognition of some of them more than others? To return to Anderson once again, who references a larger discourse on liturgy's formative capacities, "our liturgical practices form us in belief and understanding, even as they have the potential to 'deform' us."[48] Even when receptive ecumenism is sincerely attempted between two or more traditions, it is difficult to guarantee an *equal* reception of each other's gifts. In the case of COSP, an implicit hierarchy begins to form within the community, assigning the highest degree of "liturgical authority" to the United congregants to whom the building originally belonged, while second and third degrees of authority respectively extend to the Anglican and Lutheran

45. Goo, 99.

46. "Church of the Redeemer."

47. In a supplementary conversation with a COSP congregant, I learned that this lack of visual reminders of the Lutheran tradition is not necessarily reflective of the value that Lutherans assign to liturgical space. Rather, when the ecumenical shared ministry formed, there were several Lutherans in the immediate area who wished to join because there had never been a building near enough to them worship both in their preferred tradition *and* in their preferred local setting; hence, there were no windows, pews, or other materials to bring with them when they became members of COSP. Leslie Stirling, interview by Mykayla Turner, June 16, 2025.

48. Anderson, "'Together Met, Together Bound,'" 17. For further discussion of liturgical (de)formation, see also James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Antonio (Tony) Eduardo Alonso, "Damaged Goods," *Worship* 97 (April 2023): 108–26.

members who claim progressively less ownership over the space.[49] It seems, then, that Goo's opening assertion that shared parishes "experience much tension and division due to an inevitable imbalance in power and authority" is also true in the case of ecumenical shared ministries, even while it exists alongside the hope of identities flourishing and complementing each other in a shared space.[50]

Conclusion

Anderson steadfastly advocates for ecumenism as an attainable, worthwhile aim of Christian worship that is perhaps best achieved at the local level.[51] Similarly, Sandra Beardsall, Mitzi J. Budde, and William P. McDonald observe that the worship of ecumenical shared ministries "often *becomes* the [most] beloved aspect" of the initiative.[52] They also note that "mutability" is an asset of worship; as much as "those entering into a shared ministry agreement need to know their traditions will be honored and their worship will reflect their faith and commitments," worship also serves as an opportunity for denominational identities to converge or refine each other.[53] Sometimes, there are opportunities for such creative thinking in the process of negotiating liturgical space, such as how COSP has found ways to honour the memories of the Anglicans who lost their beloved Church of the Redeemer building even as they expanded their community in ecumenical directions. At other times, as Beardsall and her colleagues also acknowledge, ecumenical shared ministries may negotiate liturgical space within strict economic limits, perhaps failing to account for how their decisions might breed conflict, overlook opportunities for ecumenical exchange, or ascribe more power to one tradition than another.[54] In this paper, I have presented two case studies as contrasting examples of negotiating liturgical space that, taken together, underscore the complexity of such a task. By conducting a preliminary analysis of PCF and COSP's websites and setting my findings in dialogue with the work of Goo and others who study the intricacies of losing or sharing liturgical space, I have demonstrated how liturgical space is most fraught when it is negotiated in an ecumenical context, since each tradition maintains a unique and identity-forming relationship to liturgical space.[55]

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49. For further conversation on liturgical authority (which is notably "not limited to human beings" and might therefore refer to a liturgical *space* with more or less connection to human beings depending on their history of engagement with that space), see Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Andrew Wymer, "Introduction," in *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions*, Worship and Witness (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023), 22–25.
50. Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 93.
51. Anderson, "'Together Met, Together Bound,'" 20.
52. Beardsall et al., *Daring to Share*, 98. Emphasis in original.
53. Beardsall et al., 99.
54. See Beardsall et al., 99.
55. De Roest similarly observes that a congregation's "psychological needs" in relation to a church building cannot easily be dismissed, even when making a strong theological case for the "placeless" character of Christianity. See de Roest, "'Losing a Common Space to Connect,'" 311.

It is not realistic or even desirable for members of ecumenical shared ministries to reconcile all that distinguishes them from each other. When it comes to negotiating liturgical space, then, it seems more fruitful to engage in receptive ecumenism, which involves receiving each other's tangible contributions to the space and allowing those contributions to inflect the varied identities that come together in worship each week. While PCF takes the approach of downplaying the significance of liturgical space so that receptive ecumenism feels like a less burdensome task, COSP takes every layer of liturgical meaning into account. COSP is perhaps more likely to experience worship as "an occasion to receive the gifts of other traditions at their most profound," but doing so comes at the risk of inadvertently letting one tradition speak louder through the space than the others.[56] When comparing PCF and COSP, then, it would be inaccurate to assert that one of their approaches is better than the other. Moreover, when discerning between these approaches, an ecumenical shared ministry's decision is often mediated by their economic circumstances, which can fluctuate over the years, as in the case of PCF. The result is an ongoing negotiation of liturgical space for most ecumenical shared ministries that cannot be summarized on a webpage. This phenomenon therefore demands further research using qualitative methods, which is an ongoing task of mine. What might such work reveal? Perhaps PCF's economic constraints will lift enough in the future to facilitate the purchase of their own building, which might cause their perspective on the relationship between liturgical space and identity to shift. Perhaps COSP will extend their adaptation of a formerly United Church of Canada building to better represent their Lutheran members. With these possibilities in mind, scholars and practitioners alike must resist the temptation to imagine church buildings as static structures.[57] It is far more fruitful, and certainly truer to the diverse experiences of the people who worship in these buildings, to study liturgical space as a dynamic force that shifts identity in any number of directions, the best of which leads to an ecumenical destination.

56. Beardsall et al., *Daring to Share*, 99.
57. Goo likewise resists this temptation by drawing examples of early Christian communities renovating their liturgical spaces to support her argument. See Goo, "From Division to Encounter," 98.