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**SINGING UNITY— PERFORMING ECUMENISM:
MUSICKING AND ECUMENICAL PRAYER THROUGH THE LENS OF
PERFORMANCE STUDIES**

Thesis Approved by:

DocuSigned by:

Marcell Silva Steuernagel

F2345655762684ED

Dr. Marcell Silva Steuernagel
Assistant Professor of Church Music

DocuSigned by:

Michael Hawn

606200674000400

Dr. C. Michael Hawn
University Distinguished Professor
Emeritus of Church Music
Adjunct Professor, Doctor of
Pastoral Music Program

DocuSigned by:

Victoria M. Tufano

A7979901CA964E

Victoria Tufano, M.A., M. Div.
Community Advisor

SINGING UNITY— PERFORMING ECUMENISM:
MUSICKING AND ECUMENICAL PRAYER THROUGH THE LENS OF
PERFORMANCE STUDIES

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Perkins School of Theology

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Pastoral Music

by

David J. Anderson

B.M., Organ and Church Music, Concordia University, Chicago
M.C.M., Organ and Church Music, Concordia University, Chicago
M.A., Liturgy and Ministry, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

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In thanksgiving for the ecumenical vocation and witness of the Community of Taizé.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the foundational call to Christian unity, communal prayer for unity, and the practice of ecumenism through pastoral musicking and performing unity through the lens of performance studies. It asks the question: Can we sing and perform Christian unity? The ecumenical call is considered from ecumenical documents of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions since the Second Vatican Council. Ecumenical worship is considered a performance of unity viewed through the lens of performance studies with scholarship from ritual, liturgical, and church music studies. Two distinct services of ecumenical prayer are considered as “performances of unity.” One service is adapted from the daily prayer of the Taizé Community in France and the other is a newly created ecumenical liturgical service of healing and anointing. “Performing unity” is realized through creating, performing, and nurturing ecumenical Christian worship through embodied prayer practices, both old and new, and communal singing, all pointing to the living out and embracing God’s unifying mission in the world.

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INTRODUCTION: THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (John 17:20–21)¹

Throughout various points in my life, from childhood through my career as professional church musician and pastoral minister, I have attended and participated in the worship of different denominations of churches. In most instances, this act of praying together with others was always connected with singing in some way. Frequently, the singing and prayer included movement of some sort and perhaps human touch. Most of these encounters included two constants: making music together and being welcomed as one among the gathering. Musicking, hospitality, and a tangible feeling of community kept me coming back for more!

These encounters with others, visiting and praying within the worship of different denominations, were formative for me and made a lasting imprint on my spirit. I never labeled any of these encounters or visits to other churches as a quest to experience ecumenism or to promote Christian unity. In retrospect, I recognize the beginnings of an ecumenical call within myself—a call to communion in the unifying life of God within me, the Risen Christ, and the animating power of the Holy Spirit flowing within and among Christ’s body in the world.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the biblical quotations throughout this thesis come from the New American Bible Revised Edition.

God never ceases to call and awaken all to communion and oneness. The invitation and vocation to unity continues to be God’s initiative enacted in a community of believers. For two millennia, Christians have gathered to pray together, sing together, and heed the call of the Risen One. Despite living within the reality of division and brokenness, we have continued to gather, seek, and call upon the unifying presence of Christ to become one body—Christ’s body in the world. Can we sing and perform Christian unity?

This thesis seeks the answer to this question by connecting the ministry and practice of pastoral music to living out of our call to Christian ecumenism. Through the lens of performance studies, it examines how Christians pray for and perform unity in the communal actions of pastoral musicking and prayer. Singing and praying for Christian unity can become events that both practice and perform ecumenism. As a pastoral musician, I have seen this realized in creating, performing, and nurturing ecumenical Christian worship. Through the utilization of embodied prayer practices, old and new, joined to communal song, we create metaphorical and physical spaces for God’s people to become “practitioners of oneness” committed to unity in our Church and world.²

One of the places in Christian Scripture where we find this call to unity and communion is in the letter to the Ephesians written around 80–100 CE. This invitation to unity is emphasized in practical terms as the Deutero-Pauline writer exhorts:

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one

² Gary B. Agee, *That We May Be One: Practicing Unity in a Divided Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing and Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022), 48.

faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
(Eph 4:1–6)

We also heed the words of Jesus at prayer from John 17:20, often proclaimed, at ecumenically themed services or in connection with prayers for Christian unity. This elusive verse of Jesus in the Johannine text is a call to communion and relationality—to oneness. It must be pointed out that as much as we may wish it so, Jesus is most likely not exhorting involvement in ecumenical dialogue. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had made known the One whom he knew so well. Now, Jesus prays, “As you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us.” (John 17:21) Jesus is contemplating his oneness with his Father. With no mention of the Spirit, we may presume a foreshadowing or post-resurrection implied awareness of the Trinitarian Godhead. Jesus is praying that those who follow him might be drawn into the life of communion with the Father. The Father sends the Son to humanity precisely so that the Son may draw all humanity into the relationship and communion that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we consider both Father and Son, we note that as the Father and the Son are one yet not the same, we should not expect that genuine Christian unity will imply a rigid or formal uniformity, but a free and flowing diversity within unity. Echoing the letter to the Ephesians, our hope and desire is for unity of spirit, heart, and purpose within the diversity of all God’s people through one faith and baptism in Christ. As we discover this unity, Jesus becomes our exemplar and guide for the oneness for which he prayed.

Sadly, a lack of clarity and awareness about and a diminished passion for the call to unity is a continual challenge for Christians. Do Christians, in general, recognize the on-going call to Christian unity? Christ’s prayer “that all may be one” is for all. This “all” goes beyond the boundaries of Christianity.

Additionally, can we connect the work and foundational call of ecumenism to the fulfillment of God's mission on earth? We must. As Pope John Paul II stated in *Ut Unum Sint*:

The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this reason, he sent his Son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a Body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion must be made present.³

Christian unity is all about mission. It seeks to connect our ecumenical call to unity in Christ to fulfilling and being about the work of God's mission on earth. Indeed "that they all may be one" (John 17:21) includes doing the comprehensive work and witness envisioned by the "Ecumenical Directory" as we contribute:

to a just appreciation of the dignity of the human person, the promotion of the blessings of peace, the application of Gospel principles to social life, and the advancement of the arts and sciences in a Christian spirit. Christians should also work together in the use of every possible means to relieve the afflictions of our times such as famine and natural disasters, illiteracy and poverty, lack of housing, and the unequal distribution of wealth.⁴

In our contemporary context we would add to this already expansive list the oft overwhelming challenges of systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, environmental concerns, and the care for creation.

Myra N. Blyth, a chaplain and ecumenical studies theologian, reminds us:

The goal of unity in the modern ecumenical movement has gradually evolved. *Oikos* (house) and *oikumene* (whole inhabited earth) serve to highlight the root meanings of the term *Ecumenical*. Unity in God's household means peace within and between God's

³ John Paul II, "Ut Unum Sint" (On Commitment to Ecumenism), 1995, par. 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.pdf (accessed February 20, 2021).

⁴ The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, par. 211. <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/testo-in-inglese.html> (accessed February 20, 2021).

children; the “whole inhabited earth” points to the unity and integrity of all creation in harmony with its creator.⁵

While initially, the goal of Christian unity could be thought of only in terms of bringing deeper unity and communion among churches, Blyth points out the shift from Christian unity among the scattered churches to a more inclusive notion of unity for the entire world. This shift emphasizes both unity in diversity and unity as a spiritual gift and a calling grounded in the life of the Trinity—a life of relational communion in God.⁶

Practicing ecumenism thus entails active healing work that allows for the restoration of unity, making one whole, and growing deeper in communion as the Body of Christ. Our prayer, contemplative and active, has us both waiting for the divine initiative while moving towards and opening ourselves to all that God places before us, embracing the call to oneness and healing.

Living out our ecumenical vocation, we heed Brother Roger’s call from the Rule of Taizé: “Make the unity of the Body of Christ your passionate concern.”⁷ This passionate concern is concretized as pastoral musicians work to create spaces for prayer and engage in musicking that becomes an experience of God’s communion for all in our assemblies. Indeed, our passionate concern inspires us to move beyond the boundaries of both church and even baptism, expanding our notion of Christ’s body embracing and unifying the entire world.

I will explore the topic of musicking and performing ecumenism in four chapters. Two of the four chapters are contextually based within my local parish context of Ascension and Saint Edmund Parish, Oak Park, Illinois where I serve as Director of Pastoral Music and Liturgy.

⁵ Myra B. Blyth, “Ecumenism,” in *The Study of Liturgy and Worship*, eds. Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 223–224.

⁶ Blyth, “Ecumenism,” 224.

⁷ Brother Roger, *The Rule of Taizé* (London: SPCK, 2012), 13.

I write from my point of view as a Roman Catholic pastoral musician. My research method for chapter one included creating a detailed survey of the literature pertaining to twentieth- and twenty-first century Catholic and Protestant liturgical and ecumenical documents. These documents examined or presented materials about ecumenical call and specific times of ecumenical prayer relevant to the larger community of Christian churches.

The research for chapter two includes an interdisciplinary literature survey of ritual studies, church music practice, and performance studies. The method for eliciting data for the contextual analysis in chapters three and four included gathering responses through questionnaires and interviews with participants taking part in two different, regularly scheduled ecumenical services held at Ascension Church, Oak Park, Illinois—the service “In the Spirit of Taizé” and the “Healing Prayer, Healing Song” service.

In chapter one, I present the foundational call of ecumenism and Christian unity from the rich and varied ecumenical documents and movements of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Well before the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), both Protestants and Catholics were moving at various paces on the rigorous path towards unity. Vatican II was energized by a worldwide ecumenical movement and heeded the call for liturgical renewal and reformation. Similarly, the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 exhibited and witnessed the energy and hunger for unity among the various Christian communions worldwide, having a significant impact on the work and call of ecumenism.

Chapter two examines the role of communal song in Christian worship, liturgy, and prayer for its potential and powerful role of enacting or performing unity in the context of ecumenical prayer gatherings. I used definitions and interpretations of common musicking,

prayers, ritual actions, and gestures that support and embody our gatherings through the lens of Performance Studies.

Chapter three addresses the life, mission, ecumenical vocation, and witness of the Community of Taizé in France, celebrated as a model for performing. I reflect upon the daily prayer of the Community and its impact on pilgrims of all ages (most notably young adults) who come for a week of prayer, community, and song. Additionally, I explore the learnings and experiences of celebrating thirty-plus years of a monthly first Friday ecumenical prayer outreach enacted and performed in the spirit of the Taizé Community at Ascension Catholic Church in Oak Park, Illinois.

Chapter four highlights the development and implementation of a new ecumenical service that celebrates and performs the on-going call to Christian unity, and its import for the healing of divisions in our world. Begun in February 2023 at Ascension Church, *Healing Prayer and Healing Song* is a service in the liturgical genre that seeks to perform unity through individual and corporate healing prayer, ritual, and communal song. Ecumenical work is healing work. The call to discover, work for, and embrace the journey of unity in Christ entails the creation of sacred spaces to allow for reconciliation and healing.

Embracing this call entails the work and prayer that are necessary to bring about the healing of divisions. Ecumenical documents are born out of the lived experience and reflections of individuals, groups, and intentional communities who have chosen to move forward on the path to deeper communion. These foundational documents are both harbingers and fruits of the larger ecumenical movement, serving as continual reminders to animate, energize, and challenge all Christians to be about this sacred work and performance of unity.

CHAPTER 1: THE ECUMENICAL CALL TO UNITY
Protestant and Roman Catholic Documents since Vatican II

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there is one God who is Father of all.¹



Vatican Council II 1962–1965

For too many centuries, Christians have lived with the scandal of division within the Body of Christ. Pope Francis reminded Christians of the world in 2014 when reflecting upon the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: “[W]e should recognize with sincerity and pain that our communities continue to live in division that is scandalous. Division among us Christians is a scandal. There is

¹ Text: Ephesians 4, Taizé Community, 1984. Tune: Jacques Berthier, 1923–1994, © 1984, 2007, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MnfG_zrm_U (accessed May 3, 2024). Sung by The Songs of Taizé Session Singers.

no other word: a scandal.”² A careful study of the history of Christianity makes it apparent that no individual church, whether Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, is blameless in the scandal of Christian division and that each church must get its own household in order as a precondition for unity. This chapter briefly examines foundational Roman Catholic documents on ecumenism and the work and mission of the World Council of Churches as well as several foundational Protestant documents on ecumenism. Additionally, two examples of Catholics and Protestants living out the ecumenical call together are highlighted as a sign of the ongoing movement towards unity. Finally, the distinction between ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and Christian mission is clarified as we broaden our understanding of ecumenical unity to include our hope, desire, and work for a deeper communion in the world. These documents set a course and path towards restoring, reclaiming, and rediscovering unity within the divided Body of Christ, summoning the baptized to the ongoing movement towards unity.

How has the universal Christian church curated, emboldened, and encouraged this call to unity for our contemporary world and all its peoples?³ As the various churches try to articulate and clarify the call and challenge before us, it is important to consider the many facets of the call to unity. As we consider this call to unity, numerous questions arise: What is the Christian ecumenical call to unity? How do baptized Christians recognize and experience unity within the church and in all creation? Since the Reformation, does the scandal of multiple churches and ecclesial communities scattered throughout the world move us to work and actively pray for the

² Pope Francis, General audience talk given on January 22, 2014.

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/scandal-of-division-7509>, (accessed Sept. 20, 2023).

³ A note on the use of the uppercase “C” for Church: In most cases, as we consider documents from the Second Vatican Council, the use of an uppercase “C” will typically imply the Roman Catholic Church. This is awkward and exclusive at best. It should be noted that even in documents published by the Vatican, there is occasional inconsistently, with “Churches” sometimes being used to denote the varied and multiple Protestant denominations and bodies.

restoration of one Church? In our contemporary world, has the notion of Christian unity been lost or recast? There are probably more questions than answers. Yet, wrestling with the many questions and seeking solutions in the present time can hopefully energize a movement forward in the search for unity.

In the documents considered, both the Roman Catholic Church and the many and varied Protestant Churches and ecclesial communities since the Protestant Reformation offer an invitation to communion. The documents provide words of encouragement and challenge, offering possible pathways for moving forward. The tone of these documents originates from a place of honesty, deep longing, and hunger for unity within the Body of Christ. These documents offer a positive starting point, beginning with the foundational reality and unity experienced among all Christians through our common Baptism.

I begin with two foundational documents from the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), and *Unitatis redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism). I then consider two post-Vatican II documents, the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* and *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism*, both published in the 1990s during the papacy of Pope John Paul II. I then address the contributions of the World Council of Churches and several key writings from the WCC and conclude with a reflection on two examples of groups committed to living the ecumenical call. One, the Community of Taizé and the other, the Groupe des Dombes, both in France.

While this chapter considers both Catholic and Protestant documents since the Second Vatican Council, the ecumenical movement was alive and growing well before the time of the Council. The first session of Vatican Council II was held in Rome on October 11, 1962. Almost 2500 Bishops attended of the nearly 3000 who were eligible to attend. Other Christian bodies

were invited to send representatives to serve as observers with no speaking or voting authority. Dominican Father Austin Flannery, Vatican II translator and historian, notes that “Thirty-five observers from other Christian Churches attended the first session and their numbers increased in subsequent sessions.”⁴ Vatican II was convened through a series of ten-week in-person autumn sessions that met over four years 1962–1965. The Second Vatican Council was an ecumenical council. In addition to work and practices that promote the restoration of Christian unity, the term “ecumenical” is also used by the Roman Catholic Church to describe an authoritative and definitive council of the whole church throughout the world rather than a local or provincial council or synod. In contemporary usage, a “council” is an authoritative gathering of bishops while a “synod” is merely an advisory gathering.⁵

While the documents of Vatican II quite significantly included an entire decree devoted to the topic of ecumenism,⁶ it is significant that the first document of the council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), published in 1964, introduces the topic of ecumenism in the broader context of the Roman Catholic Church. Three central themes from the document are interrelated to our understanding and experience of unity. These include Christ and the Church, the universal call to holiness, and ecumenical awareness.

Christ’s ultimate mission was to proclaim the Kingdom of God; call people to conversion and a change of heart; and through Christ’s ministry, death, and resurrection, accomplish the

⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1964), xi.

Sixty-three non-Catholic observers attended the second session in 1963. From the start, Brother Roger and Brother Max Thurian from the Taizé Community were also present as observers.

⁵ Preparations and listening sessions have been underway since 2021 as Pope Francis has called for a synod to be held in Rome, starting in October 2023 with another session in October 2024. Its theme is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.” For the first time in history, lay women and lay men delegates will have voting rights along with the voting Bishops.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1964), 499–523.

great work of our redemption—the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. The Roman Catholic Church, as the assembly of the baptized, has been washed and born anew and given the fullness of the Holy Spirit, as the spiritual breath of her inner life. The church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, called to become an outward expression of Christ’s body in the world and to an inward relational and unitive participation in the very life of the Trinity, the sacrament of Christ through time and space until the end of the world.

Lumen Gentium stresses the necessity and relatedness of belonging to both Christ and His Church. In a time when so many profess to be spiritual but not religious, *Lumen Gentium* promotes and stresses a both/and connection between Christ and the Church. The initial paragraph from *Lumen Gentium* urges a more inclusive unity:

Since the church, in Christ, is a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race—It here proposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the entire world, to describe more clearly, and, in the tradition laid down by earlier counsel, its own nature and universal mission. The present situation lends greater urgency to this duty of the Church, so that all people, who nowadays are drawn ever more closely together by social, technical, and cultural bonds, may achieve full unity in Christ.⁷

Another foundational theme of *Lumen Gentium* is the universal call to holiness and a rediscovery of our common baptismal dignity as the People of God.⁸ *Lumen Gentium* stresses the important role of the laity in evangelization and mission. All the baptized, as the People of God, share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The ordained priesthood of the hierarchy primarily exists to sanctify, serve, and animate the baptismal priesthood of the laity.

⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 1.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 40.

Finally, *Lumen Gentium* expresses an increased ecumenical awareness. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged a common faith in Christ with the Orthodox churches and members of Protestant denominations.⁹ Moving deeper into an inter-religious context, the Church's esteem for Judaism and our spiritual links to God's chosen people is affirmed.¹⁰ The document also acknowledges those who profess the faith of Islam, as Christians share a common faith in the same Creator. *Lumen Gentium* also asserts that the Lord is not remote and affirms all those who seek the unknown God, as Paul expressed in his Athens speech recorded in Acts 17. *Lumen Gentium* is positive in its inclusion of all who are seeking God and mindful of those who aren't: "Those who have not yet accepted the Gospel are related to the people of God in various ways."¹¹ Thus we note the affirmation of relationality and connectedness with our sisters and brothers from faiths other than Christian.

Another significant document to consider from Vatican II is *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism, published in 1964. The first paragraph, with its restorative tone and ultimate concern for missional focus of the Church, sets the stage for the Christian ecumenical endeavor:

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.¹²

⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 15.

¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 16.

¹¹ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 16.

¹² Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) In *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1964), par. 1.

Throughout its twenty-four paragraphs, *Unitatis Redintegratio* defines the need for unity and names the divisions that are found both inside and outside the church. The primary named divisions are those between the Eastern Church and the division that resulted more than four centuries later at the time of the Reformation.¹³ Paragraph four is especially rich as it encourages all Catholics to take part in the work of ecumenism, promotes and acknowledges the ecumenical movement, calls for dialogue and shared learning between the churches, and delineates the important task of working together for the good of humanity. It also calls Christians to join in times of common prayer together outside of the Eucharist.¹⁴ Paragraph 4 does not shy away from the ultimate goal for Christian unity—the one body of Christ gathered at the one table:

This way, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on his church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.¹⁵

Thus, one of our most important goals is to one day officially share Eucharist at one table, sharing fully in the sacramental life of the church. For most Protestants today, intercommunion is seen as a means toward unity and an acknowledgment of a shared faith in Christ, with many denominations allowing for and maintaining an open table policy allowing for Eucharistic sharing. The Roman Catholic perspective does not currently, in most instances, allow for inter-communion, and views the common celebration of the Eucharist with the reception of the Eucharistic elements as a sign of the Christian unity that already exists, a sign of an already existing ecclesial unity. For Orthodox Christians, intercommunion is considered the ultimate sign

¹³ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par.13–15.

¹⁴ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 4.

¹⁵ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 4.

of a real and true reunion and not to be regarded as a vehicle or instrument to reunion.¹⁶ While great ecumenical strides in prayer, community, and service have been made these past fifty-plus years, one common Eucharistic table is still the goal for many in the ecumenical movement.

The document continues with calls to recognize the unity that exists and the work towards unity that had preceded the council. Paragraph 6 focuses on renewal and speaks of the dynamic movement towards unity.¹⁷ Paragraph 7 reminds us that “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion.”¹⁸ Echoing the universal call to holiness set forth in *Lumen Gentium*,¹⁹ this paragraph reminds Christians that unity is most promoted through living lives that strive for holiness and mutual love according to the Gospel. Paragraph 8 promotes prayer services “for unity” and participation in ecumenical gatherings as an effective way to petition God for the grace of unity.²⁰

The Decree on Ecumenism extols the foundational work of ecumenism in the past while being grounded in the present reality and looking with hope to the future. An excerpt from Paragraph 6 states it best, framing our reality in renewal and reformation:

Every renewal of the church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this is the basis of the movement toward unity. Christ summons the church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is a human institution here on earth.²¹

Shortly after the conclusion of Vatican II, another important and more practical document, the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (commonly referred to as the “Ecumenical Directory”) was published as a reflection upon *Lumen Gentium*

¹⁶ Thomas Best, “Ways to Unity,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 1048.

¹⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 6.

¹⁸ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 7.

¹⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 39.

²⁰ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 8.

²¹ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 6.

and *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The “Ecumenical Directory” was first published in two parts in 1967 and 1970. A revision was approved by Pope John Paul II and published by The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1993. The revision was prompted by the publication of the new Code of Canon Law published in 1983 and The Catechism of the Catholic Church published in 1992. It is addressed to the Pastors of the Catholic Church and, in turn, all the faithful who are called to pray and work for Christian unity. It is envisioned as a guide for ecumenical activity within the Church and for other ecclesial communities and churches that are not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.²²

This document highlights the search for Christian unity and articulates the organization of structures of service within the Church for the continued promotion of Christian unity. As a guide for ecumenical formation, the document proposes a plan for all Roman Catholics and those engaged in pastoral work that promotes a deepening of Christian community and spiritual activities for all the baptized. Emphasizing the sacrament of Baptism, the “Ecumenical Directory” promotes ecumenical cooperation, various forms of dialogue, and the importance of common prayer among Christians, calling all believers to common witness.

The “Ecumenical Directory” provides concrete suggestions as the Catholic Church conducts the necessary work of ecumenism. The work and task of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement is described as a search for Christian unity with large portions of the document devoted to the task of initial and on-going ecumenical formation. This includes

²² The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, par. 5. <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/testo-in-inglese.html> (accessed July 1, 2023).

systematic formation for the lay faithful, pastoral workers, and specialized formation appropriate for seminarians preparing for ordained ministry.²³

The document provides extensive suggestions for the ongoing work of ecumenism including Prayer in Common (paragraphs 108–115), Sharing in Non-Sacramental Liturgical Worship (par. 116–136), and Sharing Spiritual Activities and Resources (par. 102–107 and 137–142). The guidelines articulated in the paragraphs for Prayer in Common and Sharing in Non-Sacramental Liturgical Worship are of special interest to pastoral musicians, ministers, and those charged with preparing and leading ecumenical worship. While the thematic focus of ecumenical common prayer can be broad and varied, more intentional shared prayer in an ecumenical context “should be particularly concerned with the restoration of Christian unity . . . the mystery of the Church and its unity, on baptism as a sacramental bond of unity, or on the renewal of personal and community life as a necessary means to achieving unity.”²⁴ The document prioritizes the local parish as a locus for ecumenical activity, stating, “The parish, as an ecclesial unity gathered around the Eucharist, should be, and proclaim itself to be the place of authentic ecumenical witness. Thus, a great task for the parish is to educate its members in the ecumenical spirit.”²⁵ Of note, the “Ecumenical Directory” stresses the importance of catechesis with an ecumenical dimension for Christians of all ages—from youth to the most seasoned of pastoral ministers—as they grow in wisdom and come to know, respect, and live in harmony with Christians from varied traditions.²⁶

²³ Ecumenical Directory, par. 19.

²⁴ Ecumenical Directory, par. 110.

²⁵ Ecumenical Directory, par. 67.

²⁶ Ecumenical Directory, par. 55–91.

Parishes are encouraged, when possible, to allocate talent from the community to animate the ecumenical call and develop “a pastoral program which involves someone charged with promoting and planning ecumenical activity, working in close harmony with the parish priest.”²⁷ One can imagine the great progress we would make towards Christian unity if every church community of every tradition allocated resources and prioritized this collaborative work to animate the ecumenical call.

The positive tone of this important document emphasizes the sharing of gifts between the churches. The reciprocity of gifts celebrates and welcomes the diversity among God’s people. Christian unity is not realized in static conformity. Rather, it states:

The unity of the Church is realized in the midst of a great diversity. This diversity in the Church is a dimension of its catholicity. At times, the very richness of this diversity can engender tensions within the Communion. Yet, despite such tensions, the Spirit continues to work in the Church, calling Christians in their diversity to ever deeper unity.²⁸

The “Ecumenical Directory” challenges all Christians to work for the healing of past divisions and to re-establish unity:

The grace of God has impelled members of many Churches and ecclesial Communities, especially in the course of this present century, to strive to overcome the divisions inherited from the past, and to build anew a communion of love by prayer, by repentance, and by asking pardon of each other for sins of disunity, past and present, by meeting in practical forms of cooperation and in theological dialogue. These are the aims and activities as what of what has come to be called the ecumenical movement.²⁹

We need to rely on God’s grace for this core work of ecumenism. Honesty is required for this active and communal work of striving to overcome and heal divisions and embrace unity within the diversity of our varied communities.

²⁷ Ecumenical Directory, par. 67.

²⁸ Ecumenical Directory, par. 16.

²⁹ Ecumenical Directory, par. 19.

The final paragraphs are appropriately concerned with ecumenical cooperation in social and cultural life. Christians are called to create a more just world as we contribute to the dignity of the human person, promote peace, and work to alleviate the afflictions and sufferings that plague our world. The ecumenical vocation encourages Christians to work and study together to promote and build a Christian culture, a “civilization of love.”³⁰ In the end, through life, witness, and common prayer, Christians come to experience a deeper unity making intrinsic connections through responding in mission and outreach to the immense human need and the stewardship of our fragile planet.

Another important ecumenical document is *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1995.³¹ Pope John Paul II was hopeful and positive in his assessment of ecumenism as he looked to the new millennium as a year of jubilee. He repeatedly calls for unity and acknowledges the courageous witness of martyrs from both Protestant and Catholic traditions citing their witness as an icon for overcoming division.³² John Paul II especially admonishes Catholics to actively work for unity reminding all that “the way of ecumenism [is] the way of the church.”³³

Of the many themes addressed within *Ut Unum Sint*, five stand out and provide a clear ecumenical mandate for all Christians with special import for those charged with the task of promoting and encouraging deeper bonds of unity in their national and local churches and communities. Of primary importance is the consistent call to common prayer and conversion of

³⁰ Ecumenical Directory, par. 214.

³¹ “That they may be one.”

³² John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (On Commitment to Ecumenism) 1995, par. 1.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.pdf (accessed February 20, 2021).

³³ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 7.

life. This is practically realized in various types of prayer in common.³⁴ While not all common prayer with Christians from differing traditions may focus on unity, all prayer together has the potential to deepen unity and love within the Body of Christ. *Ut Unum Sint* states:

Love is the great undercurrent which gives life and adds vigor to the movement towards unity. This love finds its most complete expression in common prayer. When brothers and sisters who are not in perfect communion with one another come together to pray, the Second Vatican Council defines their prayer as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement. This prayer is “a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity,” “a genuine expression of the ties which even now bind Catholics to their separated brethren.” Even when prayer is not specifically offered for Christian unity, but for other intentions such as peace, it actually becomes an expression and confirmation of unity. The common prayer of Christians is an invitation to Christ himself to visit the community of those who call upon him: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).³⁵

Thus, regular times of prayer in common prayer in an ecumenical context are essential to the discovery, animation, and restoration of Christian unity.

Second, in addition to ecumenical prayer, *Ut Unum Sint* also highlights the collaborative projects that foster a deeper reverence for the Word of God through numerous joint scholarly and international efforts to develop ecumenical translations of the Bible.³⁶ Third, this document acknowledges the unifying power of the liturgical movement in both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Liturgical renewal has proven to be great gift to the ecumenical endeavor, having influenced and served as an impetus for many denominations to reassess their own liturgical practice, usually resulting in weekly celebrations of the Eucharist and the use of a common lectionary.³⁷

³⁴ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 21–27.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 21.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 44.

³⁷ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 45.

A fourth substantial theme of *Ut Unum Sint* is the importance placed upon continued ecumenical dialogue that includes joint theological study and reflection. It recognizes and celebrates the ways that communion and unity among the churches have grown and deepened as theological dialogue has continued in earnest.³⁸ All of this has energized paths to deeper unity with significant paragraphs devoted to the fruits of dialogue through the focused work of resuming communication and strengthening contacts with the Churches of the East and Sister Churches throughout the world.³⁹ Finally, a fifth essential theme “solidarity in the service all humanity”⁴⁰ encourages a strong commitment to work and continually offer prayers for peace.⁴¹ Indeed, solidarity with our sisters and brothers and a commitment to end all that keeps our world from peace remind us of our engagement with the *missio Dei*. Pope John Paul II states:

Together with all Christ's disciples, the Catholic Church bases upon God's plan her ecumenical commitment to gather all Christians into unity. Indeed, “the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavor, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and to gather all people and all things into Christ, so as to be for all an ‘inseparable sacrament of unity.’”⁴²

I now consider the work and scope of the World Council of Churches and their import for Christian unity in our world. The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, “a movement whose goal is Christian unity.”⁴³ The WCC was a fruit of the ecumenical movement, initially almost exclusively Protestant.⁴⁴ Protestant churches were responding to the tragic and

³⁸ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 28–39, 50–81.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 55–57.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 43.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 76.

⁴² John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 5.

⁴³ Website for the World Council of Churches, <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc> (accessed July 24, 2023).

⁴⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, “The Ecumenical Movement” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestantism/The-ecumenical-movement> (accessed August 4, 2023).

often hostile divisions among them. The WCC became a formal entity in 1948. The mission statement reads, “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵ The WCC describes itself as a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. The primary focus of the WCC as an organization seeks to advance and move towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers, “so that the world may believe.” (John 17:21) Currently, the WCC forms a fellowship of 352 Christian faith traditions of varying sizes from more than 120 countries representing over 580 million Christians worldwide.⁴⁶

John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* called for the various churches to continually engage in frank dialogue.⁴⁷ He also favorably acknowledged the ongoing work, continuing dialogue and positive progress of the World Council of Churches most notably through the principal documents created by the Commission on Faith and Order.⁴⁸ The fraternal dialogue called for in *Ut Unum Sint* can be thought of as an exchange of gifts among the various churches.⁴⁹ Indeed, the sharing of critical writings and documents, fruits of ecumenical dialogue, and the hosting of international assemblies every six to eight years are among the many gifts shared by the World Council of Churches throughout its history.

One critical and foundational writing is *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (The Faith and Order paper No. 111,⁵⁰ published in 1982). Through this document (commonly referred to as

⁴⁵ World Council of Churches <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc> (accessed July 24, 2023).

⁴⁶ World Council of Churches <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc> (accessed July 24, 2023).

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 16.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 17.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 28.

⁵⁰ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111. (Geneva: WCC, 1982)

BEM) the World Council of Churches sought to bring a deeper clarity of understanding to the participating churches concerning Baptism, Eucharist, and ministry. The WCC has never claimed nor sought to be a universal authority but has strived to bring churches together. This document, often referred to as the Lima statement, sought to come to a common agreement among the various member churches of the WCC. “If the divided churches are to achieve the visible unity they seek, one of the essential prerequisites is that they should be in basic agreement on baptism, eucharist and ministry.”⁵¹ The three statements comprising the document was the fruit of fifty plus years of study and dialogue begun in 1927.⁵² As Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Eastern Rite Catholics, and Protestant Christians seek to be on the way together, the Lima text provides a foundational Protestant ecumenical document, offering a highly representative and joint Protestant perspective that promotes shared understanding, study, and continuing dialogue.

The continuing dialogue fostered by the BEM document is represented by the publication of two collections of essays in 1983 edited by key ecumenical and theological voices, Brother Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright.⁵³ Both *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* represent the intentional continuation of dialogue and lived experience as the various Protestant Christian Churches and communities made steps toward unity and deeper convergence in the practices of Baptism, Eucharist and ordained ministries.⁵⁴ This ongoing effort is marked by the ever-present questions and seeking of unity in the Body of Christ.

⁵¹ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Preface par. 5.

⁵² World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Preface, par. 6.

⁵³ Brother Max Thurian, d. 1996, was a founding member of the Taizé Community and worked for many years in numerous ecumenical endeavors with the WCC and the ecumenical Groupe des Dombes. English theologian and Methodist, Geoffrey Wainwright, d. 2020, spent most of his career in the United States teaching at Duke University.

⁵⁴ *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* offers detailed essays on the sacraments and ministry with some essays highlighting the hope for ongoing reception of BEM document among the churches. *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* details multiple celebrations and texts of Baptism

Another resource that was generated through the work of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was the Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima, published in January 1982.⁵⁵ The Lima Liturgy, as it is commonly called, is a text that provides an ecumenical order of worship for celebrating Holy Communion or Eucharist. This text, prepared by Brother Max Thurian and other members of the WCC, was first celebrated in Lima in 1982 providing a model for ecumenical eucharistic celebration among the varying churches that gathered for the World Council of Churches and beyond. Additionally, the Lima Liturgy included recommendations for adaptation and shorter forms for celebration as needed. While encouraging the Lima Liturgy as a possible option for Eucharistic celebrations in both local and ecumenical contexts, the WCC points out:

In composing this liturgy for the Lima Conference, the aim was to illustrate the solid theological achievements of the Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. No “authority” attaches to this particular liturgy, save that accruing to it from the fact of its having been used on certain significant ecumenical occasions.⁵⁶

Nor does it claim to solve the ecclesiological problems (especially concerning ordained ministry) which prevent all Christians from joining together at the Lord’s Table.⁵⁷

From the outset of this consideration of ecumenical documents, both Protestant and Catholic, there is a consistent consideration of past and present divisions, our common baptismal identity in Christ and the ongoing forward movement towards unity and mission. Ecumenical documents almost universally strive to articulate past histories that resulted in divisions. They state the current context of God’s scattered people throughout the world and suggest a future filled with renewed hope and possibilities. Ecumenical documents are communal works that draw upon the lived experiences of the Body of Christ throughout the entire world, relying on

and Eucharist among many church bodies highlighting both a plurality and convergence of texts, form, and historical liturgical praxis.

⁵⁵ The World Council of Churches, “The Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima,” 1982.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-eucharistic-liturgy-of-lima> (accessed July 5, 2023).

⁵⁶ The Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima, par. 8.

⁵⁷ The Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima, par. 3.

teams of scholars and theologians who consort, pray together, and dialogue. Ecumenical documents do not shy away from the challenges at hand but strive to be hopeful in the ongoing tasks of renewing and restoring.

As there are many people “behind” the documents that call for deeper bonds of unity, there are also groups and communities present throughout the world who strive to be living signs of unity and parables of communion.⁵⁸ I briefly highlight two based in France: The Community of Taizé and the Groupe des Dombes.⁵⁹

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical monastic community of brothers founded by Brother Roger Schutz in the early 1940s with the first seven brothers, all Protestants, formally constituting the community through the profession of life vows in 1949.⁶⁰ Today, the community numbers approximately one hundred brothers from over thirty different countries, some Catholic and some from various Protestant traditions. The community takes its name from the small village of Taizé in eastern France where most of the community lives, prays, and works. Smaller fraternities of brothers live in various parts of the world, where they share life among the poor and marginalized. For over sixty years, the brothers have been welcoming thousands of pilgrims to Taizé for weeklong stays of prayer, song, and community. While the community welcomes pilgrims and visitors of all ages, most of the pilgrims who come to Taizé are typically young adults aged sixteen to thirty. The brothers and numerous volunteers provide hospitality and welcome offering a space and a place to experience community; engage in frequent prayer, song, and reflection; and to discover or encounter the unity and reconciliation that is found in Christ.

⁵⁸ Brother Roger. *The Rule of Taizé: in French and English*. (London: SPCK, 2012), Preface x.

⁵⁹ Chapter two of this thesis will focus at length on the Taizé Community. While not the focus of this thesis, I also acknowledge the gifts and presence of other communities and movements dedicated to ecumenism such as The Iona Community, Communauté de Grandchamp, The Chemin Neuf Community, and The North American Academy of Ecumenists.

⁶⁰ Website of the Taizé Community <https://www.taize.fr/> (accessed July 10, 2023).

For many years the community has gathered thousands of young adults for an annual European Meeting on the days between Christmas and New Year. The meeting takes place at various larger cities throughout Europe. The European Meeting is prepared by a team of brothers from the Taizé Community and numerous young adult volunteers in cooperation with the local Churches and with the support of the sponsoring city. Each year a theme is chosen that focuses on community, peace and reconciliation, solidarity, and mission. The European meeting in 2024 will take place in the city of Ljubljana, Slovenia.⁶¹

Since its founding, the Community of Taizé has continually worked to establish fraternal ties with both the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. Throughout the years, various brothers of the community have continued to author numerous books and other reflections on the Bible, Christian Spirituality, community, unity, and the ecumenical call.⁶² Additionally, the songs (chants) of Taizé (a hallmark of the daily common prayer) have come to be known and sung in churches and communities throughout the world inspiring services of prayer and song that focus on contemplative practice and prayer for unity, healing, and reconciliation. The chants of Taizé, included in numerous Protestant and Catholic hymnals worldwide, have become a musical vehicle for unity and communion—a gift of ecumenical song to the churches.

Brother Alois, the recent former prior of the Taizé Community, reminds us:⁶³

If communion is a gift from God, then ecumenism cannot be primarily a human effort to harmonize different traditions. It must situate us within the truth of the redemption of Christ. . . . The first ecumenical effort is to seek to live in communion with God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It is true that churches and ecclesial communities sometimes show different paths to achieving this communion with Christ. However, the

⁶¹ Taizé European Meeting 2024 https://www.taize.fr/en_article35747.html (accessed July 10, 2023).

⁶² Several titles include: *Friends in Christ: Paths to a New Understanding of Church* (Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, 2012) by Brother John of Taizé, *Faithful to the Future: Listening to Yves Congar* (London: Great Britain, Bloomsbury, 2013) by Brother Émile of Taizé, and *The Sources of Taizé: No Greater Love* (Taizé: France, Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2000) by Brother Roger of Taizé.

⁶³ During Evening Prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, 2023, Brother Matthew (an Anglican originally from England), became the new prior of Taizé.

more deeply each one belongs to Christ, the more they are enabled to see the others correctly, seeing them as sisters and brothers.⁶⁴

The Taizé Community's outreach and welcome of young adults has always prioritized the prayer in common that takes place three times each day in the Church of the Reconciliation. It is here that the movement towards unity and communion is most concretely realized through prayer, proclamation of the Word, song, and silence.⁶⁵

Another group that shares some similarities with the monastic community of Taizé is the Groupe des Dombes. This annual ecumenical gathering of French-speaking Catholic and Protestant theologians first occurred in 1937 under the leadership and inspiration of Abbé Paul Couturier (d. 1953).⁶⁶ Membership in this group has grown over the years to include forty members with twenty theologians and clergy drawn from the Roman Catholic tradition and the remaining twenty including a mix of pastors and theologians from both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Throughout its history, several brothers of the Taizé Community have been members of the group.

Each year in late August the Groupe des Dombes gathers for three to four full days of prayer, dialogue, and study. Of the annual Groupe des Dombes gathering, Gottfried Hamann writes, "It is, through the people it brings together and the issues it represents, a place of living ecumenism; that is to say, of experience lived and to be lived."⁶⁷ Like the World Council of Churches, the Groupe is independent with no sponsoring mandate from any denomination or

⁶⁴ Brother Alois of Taizé. "Make the Unity of Christ's Body Your Passionate Concern: The Path of Communion Followed at Taizé" (Taizé: France, Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2012) 8–9.

⁶⁵ A short video that captures some of the spirit of prayer and life together during a week spent in Taizé. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04AbxDxbHAK> The second video clip demonstrates the common song that supports most of the common prayer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovHBv1aHAzQ> (accessed July 17, 2023).

⁶⁶The website of Groupe des Dombes <http://groupepedesdombes.eu/> (accessed July 29, 2023).

⁶⁷ Gottfried Hamann, "The Conversion of the Churches: A Hermeneutical Study" in Groupe des Dombes Method, par. 2. <http://groupepedesdombes.eu/methode/> (accessed July 20, 2023).

other church body. Common prayer and ongoing conversion are hallmarks of the Groupe des Dombes.

The current meeting site for many years and the daily round of prayer is observed with the Benedictine nuns of the Abbey of Pradines.⁶⁸ In its early years the group alternated meeting sites between the Cistercian Abbey of Les Dombes (long closed due to a lack of monks) and the Communauté de Grandchamp⁶⁹ and the Taizé Community. In addition to joining in the monastic round of prayer at the abbey, the Groupe also alternates a daily Roman Catholic Eucharist with a Protestant celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Groupe des Dombes defines its call this way:

Such is the proper vocation of the Groupe des Dombes: to seek, in prayer and dialogue, paths of convergence with a view to the reconciliation of the Churches, and to share the fruit of its prayerful reflection. The Groupe therefore tries, above all, to live what it offers: a process of conversion. The investigation of questions that remain divisive between the Churches, and the proposal of a common word, can only find their source and their justification in the same availability of the same Lord: this is what the thrice daily common prayer means that punctuates the working days of the Groupe.⁷⁰

Throughout its history “the proposal of a common word” has been concretized through the publishing of various ecumenical writings. A notable essay, *Pour la conversion des églises* (For the Conversion of the Churches)⁷¹ has much to say about the ongoing conversion and reformation needed in all of the churches that comprise the Body of Christ by virtue of our common baptism. For every baptized Christian, our baptismal identity should be given priority over our denominational identity. This priority is an important key to our common identity and relationality within the mystical Body of Christ:

By Christian identity we mean belonging to Christ, founded on the gift of baptism, and lived with a faith nourished by the Word of God, the proclaimed Word and the Eucharistic Word. This belonging concerns both each person and the Church as the

⁶⁸ The website for Abbaye de Pradines <https://www.abbayedepRADINES.com/> (accessed July 19, 2023).

⁶⁹ The website for the Grandchamp Community <https://www.grandchamp.org/en/> (accessed July 19, 2023).

⁷⁰ Groupe des Dombes, *Communion et conversion des Églises* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), Preface. <http://groupepedesdombes.eu/communion-conversion-preface/> (accessed July 12, 2023).

⁷¹ Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993)

people of God. By ecclesial identity we mean the belonging or participation of a person or a denominational church in the one, holy, “catholic” and apostolic Church. By denominational identity, we mean belonging to a denominational church resulting from a specific cultural and historic context, with its own spiritual and doctrinal profile by which it is distinguished from other Churches.⁷²

Thus, an awareness of our common baptismal identity is key to moving together towards deeper unity in Christ. Brother Alois of the Taizé community reminds us of the ecumenical call embraced and passionately lived out by Brother Roger:

Brother Roger lived in Christ. . . . He discovered Christ in the baptized of all denominations. He even saw as “bearers of Christ” women and men who, without professing an explicit faith, were witnesses to charity and peace. . . . He saw the identity of a Christian above all in communion with Christ, working itself out in the communion among all those who belong to Christ.⁷³

Of his identity in Christ, Brother Roger stated: “I found my own Christian identity by reconciling within myself the faith of my origins with the mystery of the Catholic Faith, without breaking fellowship with anyone. . . . and with the Orthodox faith.”⁷⁴

Indeed, the time has come to cease the breaking of fellowship. The time has come to actively embrace anew the journey and movement towards Christ. All sisters and brothers, and all of creation are called to be bearers of healing and unity for all that is broken and divided within and among us. Geoffrey Wainwright’s challenge remains true:

In the absurd situation of disunity among Christians, baptism has inevitably become a focus of controversy. Baptism is the ritual sign of a christologically, soteriologically, and pneumatologically grounded unity. Yet groups separated from one another continue to perform the rite which signifies unity. A dilemma is thereby posed. Can it possibly still be the one baptism which they are severally celebrating? . . . The problem here is that of too easy an acquiescence in a continuing disunity of life, when the recognition of “the one

⁷² *For the Conversion of the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), 54.

⁷³ Brother Alois of Taizé, “Make the Unity of Christ’s Body Your Passionate Concern,” 12–13.

⁷⁴ Brother Roger of Taizé, cited in Brother Alois of Taizé, “Make the Unity of Christ’s Body Your Passionate Concern” 13.

baptism” throughout the several communities ought to be pressing divided Christians toward a closer correspondence between actual existence and the rite which signifies unity.⁷⁵

Now is the time to embrace the power and unitive reality of our common baptism.

Wainwright calls upon Christians no longer to tolerate this persisting division in life among the baptized. He implores Christians throughout the world to heed the baptismal call to go to all the nations proclaiming the Good News. He reminds us: “The dynamic of baptismal recognition should lead the divided Christian communities toward a closer overall approximation to the unity which belongs to the Church's vocation.”⁷⁶

Up to this point, each document considered in this chapter has served as a clarion call summoning Christians to unity—to live as one in Christ. Each document is grounded in our common baptism and addresses the pain of the separated Body of Christ in the world. Each document calls for continued dialogue and shared study to move forward together. Most importantly, the documents invite God’s people to conversion of heart, to prayer in common, and to take up the work of ecumenism. The Decree on Ecumenism reminds us: “This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called ‘spiritual ecumenism.’”⁷⁷

In our world today, it is of utmost importance to consider the ecumenical call beyond the boundaries of both baptism and the universal church. The ecumenical vocation entails the cultivation of the lived relationships between all people and the broadening of perceived

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 123, 125.

⁷⁶ Wainwright, *Doxology*. 126.

⁷⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 8.

boundaries. While ecumenism is concerned with our relationship and connection with Christians from varying traditions, interreligious dialogue attends to our ongoing relationships and the unity we are called to with those sisters and brothers who do not embrace the faith of Jesus Christ. Vatican II marked a revolution of sorts in the Catholic Church's attitude toward non-Christian religions. Significantly, paragraph sixteen of *Lumen Gentium* lists five categories of people who are not Christian: Jews, Muslims, "those who in the shadows and images seek the unknown God," those who "through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart," and finally, those who "without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life."⁷⁸

The Second Vatican Council, with its mandate to be attentive to the signs of the time and cognizant of an ever-expanding global awareness, devoted an entire declaration to consider the Church's on-going relationship with non-Christian religions. *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions was promulgated in 1965.⁷⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, formalized an expanded attitude of dialogue and respect for the major non-Christian religions of the world with special attention to Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It recognized a new era of inclusion:

In our day, when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines more carefully its relations with non-Christian religions. Ever aware of its duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, It [the Church] reflects at the outset on what people have in common and what tends to bring them together. Humanity forms but one community.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, par. 16.

⁷⁹ Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello, 1964), 560–574.

⁸⁰ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 1.

Several major religions of the world are highlighted throughout *Nostra Aetate* for their foundational beliefs. Hinduism is lauded for its embrace of divine mystery in its treasuring of unlimited “riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy.” Hindus are noted for their ascetical and meditative practices that seek to free one from the trials of life while lovingly directing all to God.⁸¹ *Nostra Aetate* also acknowledges Buddhism for its teachings concerning the “essential inadequacy and impermanence of this changing world.”⁸² Illumination or enlightenment is achieved through a life of spiritual discipline, practice, and divine help. The great suffering that is a part of human life can be overcome through enlightenment.

Importantly, *Nostra Aetate*, perhaps too lightly, acknowledges the quarrels and dissensions between Muslims and Christians over the centuries. Islam is respected and held in high regard where together with Jews and Christians Abraham is honored as a common ancestor and father in faith. Muslims venerate Jesus as a prophet and honor the Virgin Mary.⁸³ The positive tone of *Nostra Aetate* bespeaks an openness hardly known or preached until the Second Vatican Council stating: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts, and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women.”⁸⁴

The lengthiest chapter of *Nostra Aetate* concerns the common link and spiritual ties that Christians share with the people of Israel. Judaism and the Jewish people are honored and respected as the first to hear God’s call becoming the Chosen People who also share a common spiritual heritage with Christians. “On this account, the Church cannot forget that it received the

⁸¹ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 2.

⁸² *Nostra Aetate*, par. 2.

⁸³ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 3.

⁸⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 2.

revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God, in his exhaustible mercy, established the ancient covenant.”⁸⁵ The declaration is cognizant of the persecution and antisemitism suffered by the Jewish people throughout their long history, and strongly condemns the horrors of antisemitism, proclaiming:

Indeed, the Church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, its common heritage with the Jews, and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, it deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.⁸⁶

Additionally, *Nostra Aetate* continues in its inclusive tone, deploring the discrimination of all people, stating:

There is no basis, therefore, either in theory or in practice, for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it. Therefore, the church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion.⁸⁷

Sadly, almost sixty years after Vatican II, we experience a continual breaking of unity throughout our world. This is evident as we encounter rampant antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination of many kinds all demanding the restoration of justice through the intensification of efforts that bring about unity, healing, and wholeness. *Nostra Aetate* says it best: “We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people as other than sisters and brothers, for all are created in God's image.”⁸⁸

Christians continually join in the delicate dance of proclamation of the Gospel, proclaiming Christ, and living in unity and harmony with those of other faiths outside of

⁸⁵ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 4.

⁸⁶ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 4.

⁸⁷ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 5.

⁸⁸ *Nostra Aetate*, par. 5.

Christianity. We live in and balance the realities of a highly complex, religiously, and spiritually diverse world. In the postmodern and post-Christian reality of the Western hemisphere, Christians of all traditions encounter and navigate a multiplicity of spiritualities that cross numerous religious boundaries.

Peter Phan, world Christianity theologian, notes that by 2050 four out of five Christians will live in the Global South, namely, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He suggests that as we continue to seek church unity in the future, “it is possible that there will be no center that holds, at least in the way it did when divisions occurred during the sixteenth-century Reformation.”⁸⁹ Phan challenges us to learn from our sisters and brothers in the Global South where it is nearly impossible to be religious without being inter-religious. This calls for a stance of continual dialogue, coming to know the other in our midst.

As an example, Phan points to the rich cultures and religions of Asia among which Christians are a tiny minority and must be animated and committed to dialogue. Phan also references the four dialogues found in “Dialogue and Proclamation”: the dialogue of life (sharing joys and sorrows), the dialogue of action (working for the liberation of people, especially the poor), the dialogue of theological exchange (theological experts, deepening our knowledge of other faiths and traditions), and the dialogue of religious experience (rooted in our own traditions, we share the spiritual riches of others, especially prayer and contemplation, faith and the search for God).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Peter C. Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianity: New Paths, Different Themes, Strange Locations” in *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue*, eds. Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 169.

⁹⁰ The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, “Dialogue and Proclamation” 1991, par. 42
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (accessed February 3, 2021).

“Nothing is more conspicuous in world Christianity than the fact that the gospel is expressed in a mind-boggling variety of languages and cultures, at times even in the same country.”⁹¹ When examining the context and lived Christianity of a particular culture or cultures, Phan counsels us to notice intentional or unintentional domination by cultural achievement of the elite, those with power. These elite are not the only voices of a culture. We must seek out, listen to, and discover the Christ worshiped in a variety of ways in particular cultural contexts, engaging with, and coming to know the beliefs represented by popular culture, fragile minorities, tribal, and other neglected voices.⁹²

Carolyn Chau, Catholic theologian and professor, states that ecumenism is the greatest development in church unity from the past century, and ecumenism denotes both action and effort given to promote unity among divided Christian churches.⁹³ The proliferation of effort and work on behalf of Christian unity continues with an even greater urgency today.

As we continue to make our way along the ecumenical path, we consider the insights of Matthew Fox, ecumenical and inter-faith theologian, in his challenge to believers of all faiths to embrace what he terms a “deep ecumenism.”⁹⁴ Fox draws on the insights of Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c. 1328), Dominican theologian and mystic, who said: “Divinity is an underground river that no one can stop and no one can dam up.”⁹⁵ Fox describes “Deep Ecumenism” this way:

There is one underground river—there are many wells into that river: an African well, a Taoist well, a Buddhist well, a Jewish well, a Muslim well, a goddess well, a Christian well, and Aboriginal wells. Many wells, but one river. To go down a well is to practice a tradition, but we would make a grave mistake, (an idolatrous one) if we confused the well

⁹¹ Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianity,” 155.

⁹² Peter C. Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianity,” 155.

⁹³ Carolyn Chau, “The Church: Mission-Led Ecclesiology for Today,” in *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 236.

⁹⁴ Matthew Fox, *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2000), 5.

⁹⁵ Meister Eckhart cited in Matthew Fox, *One River, Many Wells*, 5.

itself with the flowing waters of the underground river. Many wells, one river. That is deep ecumenism.⁹⁶

Matthew Fox proposes a broader, more inclusive notion of ecumenism (more interreligious in tone). For him, there is little distinction among religions when speaking of and pressing on for unity—for humanity, for all creation, for the cosmos. While this “deep ecumenism” proposed by Fox might expand beyond the boundaries and comfort levels of some Christian ecumenists, he is building upon the deep respect and desire for the unity for all humanity espoused in *Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate* and the documents, ongoing critical scholarship, and ecumenical initiatives of the World Council of Churches. Indeed, the living water of Christ flows throughout the world with ever-ancient and ever-new invitations for all to drink the water that Christ can give. As believers, we are united by our common baptism and heed the ongoing invitation to “come to the water.”⁹⁷ We also heed the example of the unnamed woman of Samaria, ostracized within her community, and as a Samaritan, outside the tradition of Jesus, who as both man and stranger encounters and greets her at a well. (The well becomes a boundary crossing place.) Each of us in our own way can follow the path of the Samaritan woman and as we join our hearts with all the vulnerable minorities and “outsiders” of the world. Like her we must respond to the request of Christ:

“Give me a drink.” The Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” [The woman] said to him, “Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the well is deep; where then can you get this living water? Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4: 7b, 9, 11, 13–14)

⁹⁶ Fox, *One River, Many Wells*, 5.

⁹⁷ See Isaiah 51:1

Christ offers the life-giving water of himself flowing throughout the world calling all to drink, to share in his life of unity and communion. Much unity has been achieved and our work continues as we witness to all of God's wonderfully diverse peoples living, serving, praying, and singing throughout the world. Both within and outside of the boundaries of Christianity the documents call us to unity, communion, and oneness. Oneness is essential for the coming of God's reign. The God of love and source of all creation urges us on. Carolyn Chau reminds us: "Oneness is necessary to promote the reign of God; that is, if the reign of God is about the power of love to heal the world, and love is unity, the triumph of love can never be attained or attested to by a divided body."⁹⁸ Finally, the work of unity continues as we gather and engage God's people in the continual performance and practices of ecumenism discovering and strengthening the unity flowing throughout a thirsting world.

⁹⁸ Carolyn Chau, "The Church: Mission-Led Ecclesiology for Today," 233.

CHAPTER 2: SINGING CHRISTIAN UNITY
Musicking and Ecumenical Prayer Through the Lens of Performance Studies

*We are many parts, we are all one body, and the gifts we have we are given to share.
May the spirit of love make us one indeed;
one, the love that we share, one, our hope in despair, one, the cross that we bear.¹*



“In the Spirit of Taizé” service, time of communal silence after candles are placed around altar by participants.

Chapter one examined ecumenical documents both Protestant and Catholic from the time of the Second Vatican Council calling the baptized to reclaim a deeper communion with one another as the body of Christ. Chapter one also highlighted a theological study group and an ecumenical monastic community whose Christian identity continues to be grounded in and animated by the

¹ Text: 1 Corinthians 12, 13; Marty Haugen, b. 1950, Tune: Marty Haugen, © 1980, 1986, 2005, GIA Publications, Inc. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vq0011yb6jw> (accessed May 3, 2024). Sung by the “COVID” Choir and Instrumental ensemble, Blessed Sacrament, Hollywood, CA.

Christian ecumenical vocation. As seen in the documents and in various intentional groups committed to the work of ecumenism, we witness a commitment to the privileged place of common prayer for the sake of restoring, discovering, and celebrating unity. A hope expressed in many of the documents is the encouragement for Christians from varied traditions to join in times of common prayer.² Christian prayer and liturgy is a sacred action and duty we perform—a performance offered to God.

Chapter two examines ecumenical prayer through the lens of performance studies, considering such times of prayer as a performance of unity. This chapter also examines two primary components of ecumenical worship: congregational song and embodied ritual action. In most instances, ecumenical common prayer will take the form of services of the Word and other simpler and sometimes less formal non-eucharistic patterns of communal prayer. Two common performing threads within the context of Christian worship patterns include ritual and song. Like most Christian liturgy, the ecumenical call and the intentional prayer that is carried out for the restoration of unity. Performance Studies (hereafter PS) is a broad, multi-faceted discipline that draws heavily upon the academic research from ritual studies and the performing arts, especially music, theatre, and dance. This chapter considers performance studies insights from a variety of scholars, including Richard Schechner and Marcell Silva Steuernagel. Chapter two also examines some of the insights of ethnomusicologist Christopher Small along with several liturgical theologians including Mark Searle and Frank Senn.

I begin with examining worship as performance, applying concepts of the performance studies discipline. Performance theorist Schechner, one of the principal founders of the field of

² See *Unitatis Redintegratio* par. 4, *Lumen Gentium* par. 8, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* par. 108–115, and *Ut Unum Sint* par. 21.

performance studies, reminds us that all the activity and actions of life can be considered a performance and indeed fall into the realm of performance studies. He states:

What is performance? What is Performance Studies (PS)? Performance is a broad spectrum of actions, ranging from play, games, sports, popular entertainments, and rituals to the performing arts, professional roles, political personas, media, and the constructions of race, gender, and identity in everyday life. To perform is to act in a play, to dance, to make music; to play your life roles as friend, child, parent, student, and so on; to pretend or make believe; to engage in sports and games; to enact sacred and secular rituals; to argue a case in court or present a PowerPoint in class . . . and many more activities, too. PS is the academic discipline whose topic is the broad spectrum.³

Additionally, Silva Steuernagel, who writes at the intersection of church music, theology, musicology, and performance theory, considers church music through the lens of performance studies and offers a hybrid approach to church music that integrates performance studies, ritual studies, ethnomusicology, and theology with the varied facets of making church music that can provide a model for performing ecumenism in the context of Christian worship. This integrated approach recognizes and honors the breadth and diversity of church music practice in our time.⁴

The practice of church music fundamentally prioritizes congregational singing. An essential and unifying element for most Christian worship, be it Sunday worship (across traditions) or specific occasions of ecumenical common prayer, is the performance of common song within a service. Silva Steuernagel notes that using a performance studies lens for pastoral music-making acknowledges a broader experience and embodiment of church music moving within and outside the liturgical practices and walls of formal worship and its spaces.⁵ The idea of both broadening and embodying church music practices provides creative space for pastoral

³ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2020), 1.

⁴ Marcell Silva Steuernagel, "Ritual and performance in church music studies," in *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance* (London: Routledge Press, 2021), 40–64. This chapter deftly summarizes ritual and performance studies and applies them to the equally broad and varied practice of church music.

⁵ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 24.

musicians and liturgists when considering the ecumenical task of preparing times of prayer with Christians from varied traditions who practice both similar and different patterns of worship. Christian worship is embodied as we connect with God through our bodies. Embodied worship practices have the capacity to rehearse, renew, and perform Christian ecumenism.

Times of shared worship afford an ecumenical gathering of baptized Christians the opportunity to be together, to pray together, and to practice, rehearse, and perform unity. Ecumenical prayer that is more regularly scheduled in a particular community or region offers increased potential and capacity for the rehearsing and performance of unity. While annual gatherings such as ecumenical or interfaith Thanksgiving services or services to celebrate the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are both important and commendable, they are only starting points, bridges, or invitations to something more. Christians from varied traditions need to come together more frequently. More frequent and regularly scheduled times of prayer can provide for growing in awareness and deepening of Christian unity through performing ecumenism via prayer together.

What does ecumenical prayer look like? While prayer together is suggested as part of the ongoing work of ecumenism, the documents offer only minimal suggestions in terms of content and format for such services. This allows for flexibility and breadth when planning and preparing for such focused prayer events. The “Ecumenical Directory” is the most helpful document in offering suggestions for the preparation of services of prayer in an ecumenical context. Thematic suggestions are offered along with ideas for the preparation of services of the Word and encouragement to utilize more familiar patterns of non-eucharistic prayer and liturgy.⁶ For music

⁶ The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, par. 109–110, 111a.

planning, pastoral musicians and liturgists are encouraged to consider the shared familiar repertoire of song offered by various traditions.⁷

Of all the ways to enact communal worship, song can easily be considered a prime connector and vehicle for the performance of unity in worship. Singing is foundational to most forms of Christian worship and liturgy. The act of singing is also connected to the idea of performance. Consequently, singing, listening, and making music in the context of worship has uniting and bonding characteristics—physical, visceral, sensual, emotional, and psychological—that can also apply to ecumenical worship. Dutch theologian and hymn writer Huub Oosterhuis reminds us: “Singing is becoming part of a greater whole, joining in, agreeing with many other people, using words which you cannot make true if you sing them alone, but you can only venture to sing along with others.”⁸ Performing and singing unity inspires a dynamic and energized movement outward and towards the world, going beyond the physical and metaphorical walls of a particular church. Communal song within the context of ecumenical prayer can also awaken awareness and provide a personal or psychological space for integration and healing. Singing with others in worship has both healing and unifying potential. The action of singing a shared text and tune is a multi-layered event within worship that can inspire worshipers to embrace healing and reconciliation. Healing leads to wholeness and wholeness moves Christians to a deeper experience of unity and restoration in Christ.

The experience of singing, making music together, and engaging with music in any way, including listening to music, is part of the more inclusive notion of what ethnomusicologist

⁷ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, par. 111c.

⁸ Huub Oosterhuis, *Prayers, Poems, Songs* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 104.

Christopher Small defines as *musicking*—a verb denoting relationality and inclusivity. According to Small:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning, but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps, the supernatural world.⁹

Musicking can embody and take different forms in the context of public worship. The musicking that takes place in worship can be performed by all who are present and may also include individuals or groups singing alone or together and/or playing instruments separately or together. In many cases, music is joined to some sort of ritual action, gesture, or movement. In its most limited or ritually restrained context, the fact that people have gathered for prayer, breathing, and singing together entails an experience that is embodied and relational. Additionally, the musicking of a common prayer experience is an embodied act through breathing, standing, sitting, singing, and processing, experienced in services of prayer created for ecumenical contexts. It offers an added layer of intention of purpose and ongoing growth in connection and relationality. Small reminds us that:

musicking is an activity by means of which we bring into existence a set of relationships that model the relationships of our world, not as they are, but as we would wish them to be, and if through musicking we learn about and explore those relationships, we affirm them to ourselves and anyone else who may be paying attention, and we celebrate them, then musicking is in fact a way of knowing our world—not that pre-given physical world, divorced from human experience, that modern science claims to know but the

⁹ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 13.

experiential world of relationships in all its complexity—and in knowing it, we learn how to live well in it.¹⁰

Thus, any act of musicking is a performance of some kind. Musicking within Christian worship includes people coming together in varying degrees of relationship. Christian worship is not only for making disciples, but also performing faith and witness through common prayer. Both Schechner and Small broaden and enhance our understandings of musicking and the living out and “performance” of our lives. For Schechner, this performance includes everyone and everything. He articulates this breadth of performance in his nine types of performance: in everyday life, in art, in sports and other popular entertainments, in medicine, in politics, in technology, in sex, in ritual and in play.¹¹

Ecumenical common prayer often includes four or five performance categories from Schechner’s extensive list. These may include “performance” in everyday life, in art, in ritual, and in play, where the entire world is experienced and understood as a great game to be played. We can also include performance in technology.¹² In this sense, technology (e.g., sound technology, projection and utilization of visual images, live-streaming and recording the service) is employed for its connecting possibilities of moving worship and prayer beyond physical spaces to include others who are unable or choose not to be physically present. As Christians gather for focused times of prayer in an ecumenical context, they bring with them the very personal and individual reality of their daily life and experience. The space where they gather (often a church building or chapel of one tradition or another) will often include art that can be engaged and interacted with. Services will include texts, spoken and sung, along with simple and

¹⁰ Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, 50.

¹¹ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 7–9.

¹² Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 7–9.

more complex ritual actions, prepared, and offered as a means for participants to engage in a shared and hopefully unifying experience.

Ritual actions will involve the senses and often employ a variety of physical movements, gestures, and postures. An element of play is possible and evidenced in the rehearsal or worship context when ritual action “allows” for times of spontaneity and improvisation. Margaret Thompson Drewal, a performance and ritual studies theorist, states: “Whenever improvisation is a performative strategy in ritual, it places ritual squarely within the domain of play. It is indeed the playing, the improvising, that engages people, drawing them into the action, constructing their relationships, by generating multiple and simultaneous discourses, always surging between harmony/disharmony, order/disorder, integration/opposition, and so on.”¹³

In addition to Schechner’s nine types of performance, he also suggests seven functions of performance, all of which have possibilities and import for common prayer: to entertain, to create beauty, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach or persuade, and to deal with the sacred or demonic.¹⁴ While at first glance one might bristle at the phrase “to entertain,” perhaps its liturgically negative connotation can be expanded from “being entertained” in worship to something that can move beyond the notion of entertainment as amusement or enjoyment. In this case, a worship service is “entertaining” in such a way as to captivate, to charm, or even to cheer those who have come together for prayer and song. The seven functions of performance can provide a positive checklist of sorts for worship leaders and pastoral musicians to consciously strive for when preparing for worship and liturgy. In a similar way, the word “performance,” like “entertainment,” can carry a negative connotation within

¹³ Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 7–8, in Richard Schechner, (London and New York: Routledge, 202), 192.

¹⁴ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 19.

worship and should perhaps be thought of as performing a communal or sacred task, performing an act of service for God, or performing for the spiritual enrichment and benefit of others.

Of special import for those preparing to perform liturgy and worship with and for others, is Schechner's notion of restored or twice-behaved behavior. He states:

Artistic and ritual performances are consciously marked, framed, or heightened: behaviors carefully shaped, separated from ordinary life. Art and rituals are "restored" restored behavior if you will. . . . Because it is marked, framed, and separate, restored behavior can be worked on, recalled, played with, rehearsed, made into something else, transmitted, and transformed.¹⁵

Most of Schechner's descriptive words that denote restored behavior offer resonance for services of prayer in a Christian ecumenical context. The idea of restored or twice-behaved behavior places responsibility on all who gather for ecumenical prayer and highlights an engaged participation that, in the words of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, is "full, conscious and active."¹⁶ Schechner's descriptive words for twice-behaved behaviors can easily be applied to the performance of ecumenical prayer. Thus, a worship experience grounded in the call to unity is one that seeks to *restore* brokenness, *mark* and celebrate our common baptismal identity, *frame* a particular moment (changed behavior) or an experience of communion or disunity along the ongoing spiritual journey, *recall* current or past brokenness, *rehearse* and discover possible practices that lead to deeper unity, *transmit* our common story and proclaim Good News, and *transform* hearts and attitudes.¹⁷ Schechner reminds us that "Restored behavior is the key process of every kind of performing: in everyday life, in healing, in ritual, in play and sports, and in the

¹⁵ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 10.

¹⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1964), par. 14.

¹⁷ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 10.

arts.”¹⁸ At Vatican II, the core focus of the decree on ecumenism was the *restoration* of unity: *Unitatis redintegratio*. The word “restoration” is a fully active word, loaded with meaning, as it echoes (recalls) the past, grounds us in the present, and moves us forward to a possible new future.

Schechner stresses the highly symbolic and reflexive power of restored behavior. Restored behavior is also referred to as twice-behaved behavior. Restored or twice-behaved behavior is a performance that, like true symbolic acts, is multivalent, full of possible meanings, and can be performed in any place.¹⁹ He states: “The work of restoration is carried on in rehearsals and/or in the transmission of behavior from master to novice.”²⁰ Denoting rehearsal acts, specifically music rehearsals, and designated rehearsal spaces as places for restoration has special import for pastoral musicians and liturgists engaged in both pastoral musicking and for those entrusted with leading ecumenical prayer. While there are differences between rehearsal and performance, one also finds similarity in the two experiences. Be it rehearsal for a theatrical production, preparing for a choral performance in a concert or worship setting, or instructing liturgical ministers and assembly for an upcoming liturgical service, times of rehearsal offer rich possibilities for performing a unified event and fostering community. Performance and rehearsal are integrated and linked activities. Schechner states: “Performance means never for the first time. It means for the second to the nth time.”²¹

Silva Steuernagel includes the notion of rehearsal in his integrated approach to the practice of church music. He states: “Church music, when analyzed through the lens of ritual

¹⁸ Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 10.

¹⁹ Richard Schechner. *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Chapter 2, “Restoration of Behavior.” (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.

²⁰ Schechner. “Restoration of Behavior,” 36.

²¹ Schechner. “Restoration of Behavior,” 36.

performance, can be seen as an embodied rehearsal of the sacred. Because of its many ritual affordances, music helps to embody belief itself.”²² Making music together, joined to ritual texts and actions, unites bodies together in worship. Both regular and more varied patterns of worship allow for a rehearsal of identity and the claiming of beliefs. In an ecumenical context, human bodies, hearts, minds, and voices are moved towards deeper understandings of commonality, oneness, and connection where unity and communion are rehearsed, and recognized.

A further consideration of the notion of “rehearsal” from Mark Searle, liturgical theologian, likens Christian liturgy as a rehearsal for life and a performance of relationships, stating: “The liturgy is the rehearsal or appropriate enactment of relationships: our relationship to God, to one another, to those who have gone before us, to those who will come after us, and to the world as a whole.”²³ Searle reminds us that within the liturgy Christians are invited to do something together. This “doing” is a performance: liturgy is something that is done as communal gatherings, liturgies, and other services of prayer are actions performed with others that make or mark a difference. He concludes: “Liturgy is essentially a performance into which individuals fit themselves, discovering its meaning and implications, as it were, from the inside.”²⁴ Searle, like Silva Steuernagel and Schechner, draws upon ritual studies scholarship to address Christian liturgy and ritual, noting that ritual performance in the context of Christian worship is collective, formal, and formative.²⁵

For pastoral musicians, who spend a large portion of their work and ministry preparing persons for worship through all levels of musicking, the idea of rehearsal can offer new and

²² Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 62.

²³ Mark Searle, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual and Social Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 25.

²⁴ Searle, *Called to Participate*, 22–25.

²⁵ Searle, *Called to Participate*, 19–25.

enhanced possibilities for performing the work of the liturgy. For example, pastoral musicians should take great care in preparing for the choral or ensemble rehearsal as it offers opportunities for play, through different prayer experiences, community building, and musicking, each performed in a more relaxed and sometimes freer space to explore relationships through the rehearsal context. For those entrusted with the animation of the ecumenical call within different Christian communities, the idea of rehearsing unity or ecumenism offers another layer of awareness to the work, performance of, and discovery of Christian unity.

The acts of rehearsing and repetition are linked musical practices, whether in a rehearsal setting or formal worship, that are useful to consider in ecumenical prayer. Connecting ritual to pastoral musicking, Silva Steuernagel speaks of three intersecting ritual nodes present in church music: repetition, transformation, and participation.²⁶ Of the three, I will consider repetition and transformation as it relates to the performance of ecumenism. Silva Steuernagel's ritual nodes connect, link, and intersect in a myriad of ways within both rehearsal and worship contexts.

Silva Steuernagel points out that “repetition has the capacity to generate meaning and identity for participants.”²⁷ In the context of common prayer, repetition is enacted through regularly scheduled services of prayer, active participation in song, engagement with texts, and sharing in ritual gestures.

The second node, transformation, suggests a type of change, sometimes dramatic, often gradual, that can be experienced by individuals in the assembly during worship. In the context of daily Christian life, believers are continually in the process of being transformed and renewed in Christ. Christian liturgy, in general, offers many ongoing possibilities for transformation. One of the desired outcomes for Christian liturgy is that those who participate will be opened to the

²⁶ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 46.

²⁷ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 46.

possibility of transformation through the various elements of the service, many being repetitive. This is also true for prayer in ecumenical contexts. Through the integration and intersection of participation and repetition, various incremental levels and experiences of transformation become possibilities in liturgy and common prayer. Each require the consent and intention of the participant, itself a form of participation.²⁸

Prayer in common has the capacity to opens hearts to the transforming power of God in the following ways. First, liturgy transforms the assembly by the simple act of bringing people together. While someone may come to a service alone, it is within the celebration that the assembly has the potential to discover and become the one body of Christ. The individual intentionality of each person is joined together, creating a space of togetherness, oneness, and unity.

Second, liturgy transforms people through musicking. Music can inspire wonder and create space where human spirits and bodies can encounter goodness, truth, and beauty. The music of the liturgy can quiet us, humble us, emotionally move us, and immerse us in the divine love of God.

Third, liturgy transforms us through the proclamation of the Scriptures. The Word of God proclaimed, actively listened to, and preached upon, has the capacity to transform the assembly as they receive what is heard and are inspired to share and proclaim it themselves and live it out in the world. In an ecumenical context, scripture, like baptism, is a foundational source for our unity as Christians.

²⁸ In the end, pastors, preachers, liturgists, and pastoral musicians simply prepare the spaces, places, and the gathered assembly for the possibility of conversion and transformation. It is God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit who initiates transformation in the life of believers.

Finally, liturgy transforms the assembly through sharing in the Eucharist. I say this conscious of the varied theological understandings of the Eucharist and of the reality of those traditions for whom inter-communion is still not a reality. For many Christians, as we consume the elements of bread and wine, Christ's Body and Blood, and remember and celebrate Christ's presence among us, we allow our very lives to be consumed in Christ. In this embodied experience of processing to a common table, eating and drinking, and singing, it is grace, God's very life and presence within our lives, that is shared with us as we are challenged to become the mystery we have received. In this sharing, this communion, we encounter God in Christ Jesus and encounter one another as the Body of Christ joined to the great communion of heaven and earth—the communion of saints.

Clergy, worship leaders, pastoral musicians, and liturgists are called to continually create, prepare, and perform services for and within physical and metaphorical spaces to allow for the transforming presence of God to work through the liturgy. Our worship together entails communal participation in a variety of ways as assembly and worship leaders engage in performative acts that include singing, ritual actions and movement, attentive listening, and intentional times of silence. Silva Steuernagel reminds us: "It is by assuming some type of participation that one might consider church music as performance."²⁹

When considering the task of preparing a service of ecumenical prayer (in addition to his three intersecting ritual nodes), we can again look to Silva Steuernagel who offers four interdisciplinary nodes that are helpful to recognize and include in the performance of common ecumenical prayer: ritual (and participation in ritual), embodiment, making special, and play/change.³⁰ While initially directed towards church music practices, they are valuable when

²⁹ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 65.

³⁰ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 5–7.

applied to ecumenical prayer and the idea of performing unity. Silva Steuernagel's four interdisciplinary nodes serve as a foundation for the three *ritual* nodes present in church music: repetition, transformation, and participation, mentioned earlier. Silva Steuernagel states:

These nodes of ritual, embodiment, making special, and play/change are offered as a *schema*, an incremental narrative that demonstrates how, when performing church music, congregations and individual practitioners create, negotiate, amplify, and crystallize identity and meaning for the performance of faith, community, and tradition.³¹

Of the four interdisciplinary nodes, I now briefly consider ritual and embodiment.

Definitions of ritual are broad and numerous. Theologian Orlando Espín, who writes on popular religion and other forms of non-institutional religion, defines ritual as

symbolic behavior shaped by rules, and repeated, always in the same pattern. Rituals are . . . common in human cultures, . . . frequently marking the important moments of a . . . community's shared life. . . . Individuals also perform rituals to mark the key moments of their lives. . . . Although many rituals have direct connections to religion . . . , some rituals have connections mainly to . . . non-religious moments . . . and social or personal life. . . . But all rituals . . . are repetitive and rule-determined. . . . The forms and meanings of ritual vary greatly. . . . Some rituals seem to imitate real life, while others act out great social or religious myths. . . . Rituals are also privileged means by which societies and religions educate their members in the societies' and religions' belief systems.³²

Espín reminds us of the broad forms and disparate definitions for ritual. The breadth, spaciousness, and open-endedness of physical and metaphorical ritual spaces and actions bode well for those entrusted with creating and curating common prayer.

Mark Searle speaks to the expansive understanding of ritual and distinguishes between formal, functionalist, and symbolic approaches in defining ritual. A formal approach broadly defines ritual as a performance of invariant sequences of formal acts and proclaimed texts, and

³¹ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 7.

³² Orlando Espín, "Ritual" in *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, eds. Orlando Espín and James B. Nickloff (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 1179–1180.

distinguishes them from repetitive, prescribed, and more rigid, stereotyped behaviors.³³

Functionalist definitions approach ritual in terms of the purpose it serves in daily human life and the interplay of relationships among participants. Symbolic approaches consider ritual in terms of communication and activities that demonstrate meaning.³⁴ Applying a symbolic approach to liturgical prayer, Searle states: “Thus a liturgical rite may explicitly mediate contact with the divine while simultaneously rehearsing the participants in the community’s value system, covering over potential sources of conflict in the community, and consolidating the power structure operative in the community by associating it with the sacred and thus with the unquestionable.”³⁵

Pastoral musicians and liturgists need to continually grapple with and navigate the power and potential of ritual as they prepare and shepherd worship experiences for others. As we consider the assemblies that we both welcome and serve, those charged with preparing worship need to hold in tension the various understandings (and misunderstandings) and expectations of ritual in our liturgical contexts. Still, ecumenical prayer at its best should obviously expand our notions of inclusion and should gently cross our perceived and sometimes overly rigid social and ritual boundaries. Ritual actions and the use of symbol in such services, in turn, should allow space for a breadth of possible understandings and polyvalence that strives for and is sensitive to the spiritual and cultural diversity of all who gather, attempting to “meet people where they are.” Thus, an overly rigid working definition for ritual is neither necessary nor preferred. Ritual studies scholar and author Catherine Bell reminds us:

The contexts in which ritual practices unfold are not like the props of painted scenery on a theatrical stage. Ritual action involves an inextricable interaction with its immediate

³³ Mark Searle, *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, edited by Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 11.

³⁴ Searle, *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 11–12.

³⁵ Searle, *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 12.

world, often drawing it into the very activity of the rite in multiple ways. Exactly how this is done, how often, and with what stylistic features will depend on the specific cultural and social situation, with its traditions, conventions, and innovations. Why some societies have more ritual than others, why ritual traditions change or do not change, and why some groups abstract and study “ritual” as some kind of universal phenomenon when others do not—these are the questions of context that are at the heart of the dynamics understood as religion and culture.³⁶

In my ministerial context of music and liturgy, I define ritual in Christian worship as repeated patterns of behavior performed at various times within the context of a celebration. Ritual experiences have meaning-making possibilities and capabilities. Engaging in ritual will most often require intention and “buy-in” on the part of participants. Ritual performance in liturgy often includes different types of movement, gestures, texts, objects, and symbols. Finally, ritual has the capacity to facilitate the marking of identity, times of transition, transformation, and change, be it group or individual. The performance of unity in ecumenical worship then offers both possibility and flexibility in the varied possible outcomes of a worship event. Similarly, addressing the breadth of ritual studies and applying them to worship and church music praxis, Silva Steuernagel reminds us: “These investigations can be turned outward and inward because the definition of ritual is flexible and scalable; it can encompass a variety of texts and can be applied to minute or vast instances.”³⁷

Theologian Tom Driver reminds us that, “Ritual is neither a detached contemplation of the world nor a passive symbolization of it but is the performance of an act in which people confront one kind of power with another and rehearse their own future.”³⁸ For Driver, people

³⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 266.

³⁷ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 42.

³⁸ Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Charleston, SC: BookSurge, 2006), 188.

seek out meaning in their lives through ritual but often are disappointed by the enacted ritual they experience. For many in various traditions, the formal ritual of Christian worship no longer speaks to the lived experience of believers who have simply left and ceased to remain active in a formal church context. For many, it may or may not be the worship practices of a particular tradition but perhaps certain moral or other theological stances that exclude others that cause this disconnect to belonging. Why would someone worship around a sacred table where all are supposedly welcome and equal, when major groups of persons are, in fact, excluded and not welcome? For others, the message of Christianity simply fails to attract and compel belief.

Driver names this experience ritual boredom:

A condition in which people have become fundamentally weary of the rituals available to them for giving their lives shape and meaning. . . . Either the rituals, in their form, content, and manner of performance, have lost touch with the actualities of people's lives and are thus simply arcane; or else the people have lost the ability to apprehend their very need of ritual, do not see what rituals are good for, and thus do not find them even potentially valuable.³⁹

Ritual boredom poses a steep challenge to those who prepare and welcome Christians to common ecumenical prayer. The reality of exclusion and a lack of welcome in various Christian traditions is a sin against unity and communion in Christ. In this sense, ecumenical worship can also appear to lack authentic hospitality offering little for the marginalized and excluded, with worship simply being more of the same: songs, prayers, gestures of welcome offered but not enacted or authenticated.

In contrast, ecumenical common prayer has prophetic potential offering the possibility to go against the grain of a “stuck” or stumbling religious tradition and create and pray in new and honest ways that truly open doors of welcome, inclusion, and unity. Prayer together can offer

³⁹ Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 7.

safe and liminal places for those who experience exclusion in both church and society and who do not feel welcome and accepted due to race, gender, and/or sexual orientation. Tom Driver reminds us:

Ritual offers an occasion for social alienations to be suspended. They are not exactly eliminated, but they are for a time, transposed in such a way as to lose whatever semblance of ultimacy they otherwise have. The liminality of ritual, then, is a recourse from society's alienating structures to a generalized bond of unity (*communitas*) that is felt or intuited among humans and other beings.⁴⁰

Common ecumenical prayer has the potential to welcome all in their authentic and embodied selves.

Another of Silva Steuernagel's four interdisciplinary nodes is embodiment. The performance studies perspective recognizes this node for its ability to enact unity and celebrate oneness and communion with others through our bodies. Christian worship involves the human body. In worship, God's gathered people experience in their bodies the common humanity that we share. Our prayer at its most simple is embodied. Worshiping with our bodies, forming one body, entails recognizing the embodied experience of musicking, ritual, and liturgy. For Christians, the body is a familiar metaphor. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves, or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:12–13)⁴¹

We form one body, baptized and worshiping as one. Searle reminds us: "Ritual symbol is an enacted symbol: it is an embodied parable."⁴² All our prayer together is thus embodied—moving through our body—still bodies, breathing bodies, singing, and speaking bodies, standing,

⁴⁰ Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 162.

⁴¹ See also: Romans 12:5, 1 Cor 10:17, 1 Cor 12:20

⁴² Searle, *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 14.

sitting, wheeling, and kneeling bodies, processing bodies, interacting, and embracing bodies. Even virtual prayer on-line is embodied.

What does an embodied time of common prayer look and feel like? Sometimes elegant and sometimes messy, but always bodies together! We perform life with our bodies. Authentic Christian spirituality is connected to our “bodyliness” and cannot be separated from our incarnational faith. Christ is the Word-made-Flesh. Christ became human. The human Jesus had a body. Christians are called to holiness, which includes bodily “wholeness” or even “wholiness,” and our worship is not to be a disembodied experience.

Frank Senn states:

Authentic Christian spirituality is always an embodied spirituality. It gives attention to matters of food and sex as well as fasting and abstinence. It is expressed in art, music, dance, and drama that utilizes the body as the means of communication. The very logic of Christianity is that God communicates his life and love to us in and through the body—the Word made flesh.⁴³

Thus, performing ecumenism is about human bodies, together, intentionally joining in a time of prayer that unites and moves toward oneness in Christ and each other. Ecumenical prayer is invitational and invites all participants, wherever they find themselves in their life’s journey, to remember that they are part of one body—the Body of Christ—and called to a deeper awareness of and movement towards wholeness, holiness, and communion. As embodied believers, W.

David O. Taylor reminds us:

It matters precisely [what we do with our bodies] because our bodies have been caught up in the physical body of Christ. Through Christ’s ascended flesh, his *sarx*, as the Gospel writer testifies, the purpose of all flesh—namely, communion with God—is apprehended. Just as in Christ’s body we discovered the true extent of the human body’s brokenness, so too in Christ’s body do we discover its unqualified belovedness. As the temple of the

⁴³ Frank Senn, *The Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 373.

Holy Spirit, moreover, the body becomes a “place” in which the glory of God is witnessed.⁴⁴

Embodied worship with Christians from other traditions is an essential component of what *Unitatis Redintegratio* describes as Spiritual ecumenism, “the soul of the whole ecumenical movement.”⁴⁵ Each event of common prayer is thus joined to our enacted witness of unity in the world. Our performance of prayer and musicking at the service of unity is dynamic and forward-moving and connected to witness, “moving within and outside the walls and liturgical practices of formal worship and its spaces.”⁴⁶ All entrusted with the creation and enactment of common prayer must hold in dynamic tension the interrelated reality and vision of spiritual ecumenism.

The final section of this chapter considers an additional resource helpful in providing both practical and integrative suggestions for the preparation of ecumenical prayer as it relates to performing unity as the Body of Christ. The content and pattern of such prayer should be both simple, inclusive, welcoming, and concerned with God’s mission in the world.

In 2020, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published “The Bishop and Christian Unity: an ecumenical *vademecum*.”⁴⁷ This handbook, prepared for bishops throughout the world, stresses the integration of spiritual ecumenism with the three dialogues of love, truth, and life that form the heart and soul of the ecumenical movement. These “four pillars” of the ecumenical vocation stress the dynamic and integrated movement of the ecumenical task:

The ecumenical movement is one and indivisible and should always be thought of as a whole. Nonetheless it takes various forms according to the various dimensions of ecclesial life. Spiritual ecumenism promotes prayer, conversion, and holiness for the sake

⁴⁴ W. David O. Taylor, *Glimpses of the New Creation: Worship and the Formative Power of the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 190.

⁴⁵ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, (Decree on Ecumenism) par.8.

⁴⁶ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 24.

⁴⁷ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “The Bishop and Christian Unity: an ecumenical *vademecum*” 2020 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/04/201205a.html> (accessed September 8, 2023). (A *vademecum* is a handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation.)

of Christian unity. The Dialogue of Love deals with encounter at the level of everyday contacts and co-operation, nurturing and deepening the relationship we already share through baptism. The Dialogue of Truth concerns the vital doctrinal aspect of healing division among Christians. The Dialogue of Life includes the opportunities for encounter and collaboration with other Christians in pastoral care, in mission to the world and through culture.⁴⁸

Ecumenical prayer is not to be an isolated event but intrinsically integrated to spiritual ecumenism. Integral and flowing from our prayer together with other Christians come the three dialogues of Love, Truth, and Life. The word “dialogue” entails action and reciprocity. Together these four pillars can be experienced as interrelated and essential for growth in the ecumenical vocation. Prayer and action come together as we strive to “pray” our life with others, foster moments of encounter, become agents for the healing of divisions and brokenness, and, finally, to bear common witness through mission and outreach to the world. Praying together, mindfully encountering, and embracing others with love, working as agents of healing and reconciliation, and engaging in the mission and pastoral care of the Christian community are interrelated performable acts—duties we perform as disciples in the world.

Ecumenical common prayer is rehearsed, performed, and enacted. Bodies together intersecting and interacting with one another, through ritual action that takes place and is embedded in patterns of prayer both ancient and new, within the physical space interacting with the objects, artifacts, and sounds contained within that space. This fun, messy, and fluid *mélange* of performance ideas is appropriate for the potentially messy and fluid common prayers we prepare on behalf of God’s scattered body called to unity. What prayer do we perform? What are the possible structures that allow for God’s beautiful and diverse people to gather as one?

⁴⁸ The Bishop and Christian Unity, par.15.

As mentioned earlier, the “Ecumenical Directory” and more recently affirmed ecumenical *vademecum* both offer concrete suggestions and ideas for various types of prayers to be shared and celebrated in common. From the various suggestions we can consider embracing established forms of non-sacramental worship as experienced in various denominations and traditions. In most cases, ecumenical prayer in common will resemble and take the pattern of a simple Liturgy or Service of the Word, very similar to what most Protestant traditions enact on Sundays when not celebrating Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper. A Service of the Word might include a gathering hymn, greeting and welcome, opening prayer, one or more scripture readings, a sermon or reflection, intercessory prayers, the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, final blessing, and sending. This basic service of the Word can include various musical elements that call for common song.

Another somewhat familiar example to consider is the regular praying together of morning or evening prayer or a service of compline (night prayer). Employing the established prayer forms of Morning or Evening Prayer from a specific tradition provides a framework and pattern from time-honored liturgical traditions grounded in the Word of God, psalmody, and the sanctification of the day. Both Protestant and Catholic communities who already celebrate regular times of prayer outside of Eucharist would do well to expand their vision of inclusion to welcome and invite all to join in these regular patterns of prayer. Simple collects for unity, healing, and peace could be intentionally included to broaden the context and scope of such celebrations.

An example of this idea of broadening the inclusiveness of an established prayer form is Sunday Compline at St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle, Washington.⁴⁹ Peter Hallock (1924–2014) began this tradition in 1956 and most likely never initially envisioned that this

⁴⁹ <https://saintmarks.org/worship/compline/> (accessed October 15, 2023).

service of Compline would become a vehicle for ecumenical performance attracting both believers from many traditions and non-believers from many walks of life. Hallock took an age-old and familiar common prayer form and adapted it to his musical and liturgical context and setting. The age-old liturgical pattern of compline was shaped anew and recontextualized by not only singers, musicians, and the physical space of St. Mark's Cathedral, but by all who were drawn to this experience of night prayer. Thus, the weekly repetition of sung Compline at St. Mark's has become a performance and performing space for ecumenism and unity grounded in choral and assembly song, scripture, liturgical prayer, and silence.

Still, while standard liturgical patterns of prayer can be a good framework and starting point for ecumenical prayer, by not imposing or strongly suggesting a specific pattern or form for common ecumenical prayer, the "Ecumenical Directory" indirectly encourages creativity in the preparation of prayer services. Creative space and time are needed to discern possibilities for the preparation of common ecumenical prayer. Varied communities can learn from each other as they plan and prepare together, being sensitive to the current contexts and worship patterns of differing churches.

For those entrusted with preparing ecumenical common prayer, the *vademecum* suggests placing special emphasis on praying the Lord's Prayer together as the common prayer par excellence of the baptized.⁵⁰ The "Ecumenical Directory" also suggests common themes and intentions for prayer including: prayers for peace, the healing of social concerns, both local communities and throughout the world, mutual charity and respect among all people, the dignity of the family, and prayers for the alleviation of poverty, hunger, and violence.⁵¹ The strongest directive for the content of common prayer is found in paragraph 110 of the Directory: "Shared

⁵⁰ The Bishop and Christian Unity, par.17.

⁵¹ Ecumenical Directory, par. 109.

prayer should, however, be particularly concerned with the restoration of Christian unity. It can center, for example, on the mystery of the Church and its unity, on baptism as a sacramental bond of unity, or on the renewal of personal and community life as a necessary means to achieving unity.”⁵² These themes are rich with possibility for enacting more regular times of common prayer throughout the year.

The “Ecumenical Directory” also encourages worship and liturgy planners to draw from the common prayer patterns, texts, and a repertoire of sacred song from other Christian traditions stating: “It is desirable that the structure of these celebrations should take account of the different patterns of community prayer in harmony with the liturgical renewal in many churches and ecclesial communities, with particular regard being given to the common heritage of hymns, of texts taken from lectionaries, and of liturgical prayers.”⁵³ The beauty and reality of varied traditions celebrating more uniform patterns of Word and Sacrament, employing more common texts in the celebration of the Eucharist, are continuing signs of the performance and progress of Christian unity through the engagement with and embrace of the liturgical renewal movement in our day.

Recognizing and embracing a common heritage and repertoire of hymns is also a great gift of the ecumenical movement. Sharing and singing new texts and tunes also strengthens bonds that move across and beyond the boundaries of Catholic, Protestant, and even Orthodox traditions. Pastoral musicians should seek out, familiarize, and attune themselves to both old and new texts and tunes that can allow for Christians to perform and be formed and in the ecumenical call.

⁵² Ecumenical Directory, par. 110.

⁵³ Ecumenical Directory, par. 110.

Similarities in rites and orders for prayer, other than the Eucharist, is also a gift of the ecumenical movement. Another example of this sharing of gifts brought on through the liturgical renewal is the existence of rites for healing and anointing found in the official worship books and hymnals of various Protestant denominations.⁵⁴ Many of these rites and rituals share commonality between the Roman Catholic (for whom the Anointing of the Sick is a formal sacrament) and Protestant traditions. While most Protestant traditions officially recognize only Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments, orders of prayer and worship for the sick and rites of healing and anointing have become more common “sacramental” and ritual practices. Services created around the themes of healing offer possibilities for prayer as communities join to work and pray for the healing of division and brokenness.

Ecumenical prayer seeks to unite and restore hearts and offers the possibility of expanding boundaries of place, relationship, and connectedness with others from differing traditions. These services recognize, perform, and engage with the gifts from the varied traditions of Christianity. Some of these gifts include: the Word of God, a common and varied repertoire of song, processions, ritual gestures, and symbols that allow for the participation of all. Planners of ecumenical prayer should, where appropriate, invite assemblies to interact or engage with both the primal and primary symbols of our common Baptism: water, light, and oil. The gathered assembly in Christ should also be seen as a primary symbol of unity. Ecumenical prayer considered through the lens of performance studies acknowledges the space and practices needed for the flexible and creative enactment and performance of patterns of unity and oneness.

⁵⁴ See for example, *Book of Common Worship: Pastoral Edition*, Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. John Knox Press, 2018 (353–385), *The Book of Common Prayer*, According to the use of the Episcopal Church, The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York and The Seabury Press, 1977 (453–461), *Iona Abbey Worship Book*, The Iona Community, Wild Goose Publications, 2001 (88–97), *A New Zealand Prayer Book = He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*, The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, Harper One, 1989 (756–766), *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992 (613–629). Additionally, various evangelical traditions practice services of healing and anointing in various contexts.

Chapter three will offer two examples of regular common prayer that strive to enact and create spaces for the performance of ecumenism.

CHAPTER 3: MODELS OF SINGING UNITY

The Community of Taizé, France, and Prayer in the Spirit of Taizé, Oak Park, Illinois

*Let all who are thirsty, come. Let all who wish, receive the water of life freely.
Amen, come, Lord Jesus. Amen, come, Lord Jesus.*¹



“In the Spirit of Taizé” service of light.

In this chapter I reflect upon the ecumenical vocation and witness of the Community of Taizé in France that enacts and celebrates in its daily prayer a model for performing unity in the Christian life. Additionally, I explore an adapted service of prayer performed in the spirit of the Taizé

¹ Text and Tune: Taizé Community © 2011, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZnIdjufhSE> (accessed May 3, 2024). Sung during a 2010, Friday Evening Prayer in Taizé.

Community at Ascension Catholic Church in Oak Park, Illinois. Each prayer is considered through the lens of performance studies utilizing Marcell Silva Steuernagel's five modes of participation in church music: presence, singing, silent participation, surrogate participation, and immersive spectatorship.²

The call to unity in the Body of Christ is offered to everyone. In common ecumenical prayer, all are invited to pray and sing together as we perform and enact unity. Times of shared prayer are both rehearsals and performances of unity. These prayer services are grounded in our baptism and ideally follow a simpler format resembling a Service (or Liturgy) of the Word. One option for regular prayer is to follow the established non-eucharistic worship format or pattern from other traditions, such as Morning or Evening Prayer as celebrated in the Episcopal Church. Another possibility is to design a service that incorporates the rite of reaffirmation of baptism provided in the worship orders of various traditions into a service that celebrates our common baptism in Christ.³ Each of these examples offer experiences that potentially include assembly song and ritual action that engage ecumenical assemblies in the movement toward unity. Of the options proposed, the daily prayer celebrated three times each day in the Taizé Community, in France stands out as a simple and worthy model to follow for those committed to preparing ecumenical prayer.

The prayer of the Taizé Community has become increasingly familiar worldwide. Both the daily prayer and original music emanating from Taizé has become synonymous with ecumenical prayer. People of all ages (mostly young adults) journey to Taizé for a week of prayer, song, and community. Over many years, the experience of prayer and song in Taizé is

² Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 73.

³ See for example, "Reaffirming of Baptism for a Congregation" in *Book of Common Worship: Pastoral Edition*, Presbyterian Church, U. S. A. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2018 (81–83).

something that pilgrims have wished to replicate in their local communities, offering times of ecumenical prayer incorporating the songs of Taizé.

Prayer together for the sake of unity is a vital part of the ecumenical endeavor. Common prayer, as attested to by various documents, is a “movement towards unity.”⁴ It is a crucial and dynamic part of the ecumenical movement in general. Pope John Paul II said it beautifully: “Love is the great undercurrent which gives life and adds vigor to the movement towards unity. This love finds its most complete expression in common prayer.”⁵

Some thirty years after founding the Community of Taizé in 1940, Brother Roger wrote words of promise and hope as he considered ecumenical renewal among the churches. Filled with realistic hope, his words still hold true for the Christian community. We, through the ecumenical movement, have experienced great strides towards Christian unity and at the same time still feel the wounds of division. Brother Roger then and the Taizé Community today call each of us to find a place and discover God’s unifying call to dwell within a dynamic tension of “waiting” and “running towards.” He offers words of encouragement for those who hope for deeper unity even as we sense institutional ennui for the ongoing tasks of the ecumenical vocation. Brother Roger lived out his ecumenical vocation within a contemplative and active stance:

It is only in contemplative waiting upon God that we can find new momentum.
Wait! Wait for the dawning of a life when God will gather us into his arms forever.
Wait for a communion within the People of God that will spark a communion among all people. Wait for the spirit of mercy, for love that is not a consuming fire is not charity, and without charity we would be professing ecumenism without hope. God is preparing for us a new Pentecost that will set every one of us ablaze with the fire of his love. . . .

Our part is to run and meet the event that will upset all our human calculations and bring life to our dry bones. Run towards and not away! Run to meet humankind’s

⁴ Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 6.

⁵ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, par. 21.

tomorrow. . . . Run to meet all who cannot believe, and to struggle alongside the most exploited. Run to support a rebirth of the People of God. . . . Run toward a Christian community wearied by its long journeying and do everything possible to keep the ecumenical wave from falling back.⁶

The words “wait” and “run towards” encourage us to create and acknowledge spaces of resting and movement within the realm of pastoral musicking. Together, the acts of waiting and running towards something form an active and dynamic tension. This tension is keenly present in most ecumenical efforts and endeavors. I approach this writing with a special fondness for the joys, challenges, and tensions that accompany and present themselves in the ministry of pastoral musicians. Along with pastors and priests, pastoral musicians share a heightened capacity to become cultivators and animators of unity. Indeed, I would argue that the most successful pastoral musicians are those who have embraced the ecumenical vocation as a foundational call from Christ, rooted in baptism, and have rehearsed and been schooled in the practices of waiting for and running towards unity and communion.

In addition to knowing its daily prayer, it is helpful to learn more about the life and ecumenical witness of the Taizé Community.⁷ While perhaps best known for their songs, many sung throughout churches around the world, more helpful is the learning about a typical week spent in Taizé as both an opportunity and experience of rehearsing and performing unity. Within this week of prayer, song, and life together, one can recognize what I term the four pillars of ecumenism: spiritual ecumenism (of which common prayer is a priority), the dialogue of love, the dialogue of truth, and the dialogue of life.⁸ It is in Taizé that these are brought to life as an

⁶ Roger of Taizé, *The Dynamic of the Provisional* (Bungay, Suffolk: Les Presses de Taizé, 1981), 78-79.

⁷ Various books have been written about the Taizé Community. See for example: Jason Brian Santos. 2008. *A Community Called Taizé: A Story of Prayer, Worship and Reconciliation*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press and one of the earliest books, Rex Brico, *Taizé: Brother Roger and His Community*. 1978, London: Collins.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “The Bishop and Christian Unity: an ecumenical vademecum” 2020 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/04/201205a.html> (accessed September 8, 2023). par. 15.

integrated performance of Christian unity. Most who spend a week or more in Taizé would name the daily prayer as the most notable experience and unifying activity of the week. Flowing from and integral to the prayer are “performances” of the three dialogues of love, truth, and life. While most pilgrims might not name it so, it is in the daily round of scheduled activities that make up a day and a week that these interrelated dialogues are experienced in a most organic and patient way.

The dialogue of love can be experienced in the everyday moments of encountering persons who have travelled from various parts of the world to be in Taizé. Most visitors to Taizé are young adults from a variety of traditions, and the week together provides for a deepening of understanding of both similarities and differences among the baptized. Many come to Taizé with questions and doubts about faith and life. These are often addressed in the daily bible introductions led by various brothers of the community and in the small group sharing times held at different times in the day. The dialogue of love is also deepened in the sharing of meals and in the practical work (shared by all) such as cleaning, food preparation, and serving meals.

Like the dialogue of love, the dialogue of truth is encountered in the daily reflection groups that allow for the possibility of the healing of divisions as participants learn more about each other’s lives, discovering both similarities and differences in their faith journeys, varied denominational traditions, and cultures. I have found that the dialogue of truth is also discovered in the daily silence that is a part of the common prayer. Silence has a way of allowing thoughts about one’s life to surface. Embracing silence in prayer both calls and challenges a person to embrace a deeper honesty about one’s life, place in the world, and relationship with God. Taizé is often experienced as a safe place to consider difficult questions and make personal discoveries. The daily prayer takes place in the Church of Reconciliation (the main gathering place) and

provides an experience of unifying prayer that offers the capacity to heal divisions simply through gathering, singing, listening, and sharing silence together.

Finally, the dialogue of life is concerned with our shared mission in the world and the living out of our Christian call wherever we find ourselves. Within the ecumenical call, the dialogue of life is about embracing and seeking out opportunities to reach out in care towards others, mission to the world, and our encounter with the prevailing culture. Visitors to Taizé learn a lot about different cultures during a week of life together. Workshops occur each week on different topics that address challenges currently affecting our world. The Community of Taizé also assists with numerous agencies and international outreaches of care throughout the world through Operation Hope.⁹ Since its founding in the 1940s, the Community has always demonstrated a special concern for refugees (with individuals and families often living in Taizé) and has continually sent small groups of brothers to live in fraternities in various parts of the world, mostly among the poor. In all these places, it is the thrice daily common prayer that grounds the experience and the ecumenical vocation.

⁹Taizé: Operation Hope, https://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique3426.html (accessed December 18, 2023)

Prayer and Song in Taizé, France

At Taizé, the daily prayer is primarily ritually enacted as an experience of common song. While there are various nuances to the prayer order depending upon the time or day (such as Friday Evening Prayer Around the Cross), most of the daily round of services share a somewhat stable and predictable format. In general, aside from the common song, there is very little ritual action; with all remaining seated for most of the service. The only recited elements in a typical prayer are the scripture reading and a prayer (after the silence or usually a concluding prayer) led by a brother (often the prior) of the community. Both the reading and prayer are proclaimed in a variety of languages by various brothers in the brothers' prayer area.

There is a regularity to the prayer. The common prayers take place three times each day, Monday through Saturday with Morning Prayer at 8:15 AM, Midday Prayer at 12:20 PM, and Evening Prayer at 8:20 PM. The bells peal for ten minutes before each service, creating a sonic ritual of sorts as all begin to make their way to the church. The Sunday schedule is slightly different with Eucharist at 10:00 AM and Evening Prayer at 8:20 PM. Most pilgrims who stay for one week, depart at some point after Eucharist on Sundays. New arrivals are welcomed on Sunday afternoon beginning at 3:30 PM. Visitors who are welcomed to Taizé are expected to participate in all the common prayers and events of a given week. The brothers of Taizé form an ecumenical monastic community of brothers. The daily round of prayer is essentially monastic and loosely based on the Liturgy of the Hours and guided by the liturgical year. It is monastic and contemplative in its regularity and performance of mantra-like repetitive songs that foster reflection and contemplation. The use of the now-famous Taizé chants in the daily round of prayer was a practical and hospitable adaptation made by the community to tangibly welcome through prayer and song the thousands of young persons who began coming to Taizé in the early

1960s. The origin of the songs of Taizé is a story of collaboration and adaption between the brothers of Taizé (initially through the work of Brother Robert) and Parisian Catholic liturgical composer, Jacques Berthier.¹⁰ In addition to the practice of common song, the embodied practice (bodily posture) of the daily prayer is primarily one of sitting, reminiscent of a “contemplative sit,” with all facing towards a primary prayer area. For twenty-first century believers and seekers, the more meditative prayer practice is a welcome respite from the busyness of daily life and work. Additionally, for all who come to Taizé, the regularity of three times of common prayer each day provides ample experience in the practice of rehearsing and performing prayer.

As we consider the daily prayer in Taizé, it is important to have a basic understanding of the general pattern and form of the prayer as it is currently celebrated. The three daily times of prayer include the following basic elements with various exceptions noted.

Typical Daily Prayer Pattern Observed in Taizé

Opening songs (one or two)

Psalm (most often utilizing a sung Alleluia as a recurring refrain)

Bible Reading (proclaimed in a variety of languages)

Responsory (follows the reading most days at morning prayer)

Song (calmer) often related to the theme of the Bible reading

Silence (complete silence 5–10 minutes)

Intercessions or Litany of Praise

Our Father (usually only sung at Morning Prayer)

Concluding Prayer

Several concluding songs

¹⁰ See Jacques Berthier, <https://giamusic.com/artists/jacques-berthier> (accessed January 4, 2024).

The following additional variations occur each week:

Morning Prayer on Tuesdays through Saturdays concludes with a Communion Service.

Evening Prayer on Friday concludes with Prayer Around the Cross.

Evening Prayer on Saturday concludes with a service of light that celebrates the Resurrection.¹¹

Examining the common prayer as experienced in Taizé, I employ Silva Steuernagel's five modes of participation in church music using them as a performative lens to demonstrate the daily prayer in Taizé as a performance of unity and ecumenism. The five modes of participation (presence, singing, silent participation, surrogate participation, and immersive spectatorship) are apparent in varying degrees in services at Taizé.¹² To participate is to take part or to engage in something. It can also entail engaging in a common activity with others. Initially, participation in a service of prayer is about the intention and action of simply showing up for the service. To engage in a common service of prayer is a performance of sorts. Even the level or degree of participation or non-participation on the part of those gathered is a performance. Since the Second Vatican Council we have continued to uncover and understand the call for "full, conscious, and active participation" as a primary goal for the gathered assembly within the liturgy.¹³

¹¹ This is the typical pattern of daily prayer in Taizé. A simpler outline is provided in the Taizé resource, *Prayer for Each Day* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 1998) 1–7.

This resource is published and available in numerous languages to all who wish to prepare a time of prayer using the songs of Taizé.

¹² Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 73.

¹³ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1964), par. 14.

In the following sections, each of the five modes are treated separately. Each mode suggests an intensification of engagement with the performance of various actions that constitute participation in worship.

The first mode of participation is presence. Making the journey to Taizé from one's country implies a certain level of commitment to being present and participating in the experience at Taizé. First-time visitors to Taizé may or may not have a clear notion of what an ecumenical community is or even what is to be expected. In my experience, leaders of youth groups and small groups of college students do a fine job preparing young people for the experience and are careful to allow space for the young people to simply be in the moment throughout the week. Spending a week in Taizé and entering into the flow of the schedule for the week is an act of intentionality and being present.

Being present for the regular times of prayer is a matter of simply showing up and taking part in a rather uncomplicated experience of worship. Participation entails the physicality of walking to the church accompanied by the sounding of the bells, moving towards the church, entering in and finding your place, letting your mind settle, becoming aware of others around you, perhaps closing your eyes and becoming present to God and those around you, watching the brothers come into the church, breathing, and taking in and noticing the space and all who gather.¹⁴

The second mode of participation is singing. One of the most notable elements of the prayer at Taizé is the common song that comprises most of each service. At Taizé everyone is free to participate; no one is ever coaxed or cajoled to sing. It feels quite natural and safe to join

¹⁴See an Evening Prayer in Taizé on Saturday, December 23, 2023, celebrating the beginning of Advent IV. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3V4hsny0jt8> (accessed December 23, 2023). See also the first two minutes of pilgrims and brothers entering the church for the Evening Prayer on January 13, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEzygeDjXYo&t=384s> (accessed January 17, 2024).

in the song. As part of the weekly program there is the daily song practice (usually in the church) that introduces some of the songs that will be sung throughout the week. This practice is not mandatory, but many participate. It is especially helpful for those attending Taizé for the first time as it creates a gentle and welcoming environment for singing and learning some of the songs. The rehearsal time also highlights the subtle primacy of common song experienced in each service. Further, having this activity in the church strengthens the connection of place with the act of singing. The experience of common song in Taizé is consistently more gentle than robust.¹⁵ Most Taizé chants are short songs of four to eight measures intended to be repeated multiple times. The repetitive singing is both meditative and unifying.

The third mode is silent participation. While the prayer at Taizé mostly consists of common song, another integral and noticeable part of each service is the period of intentional silence. Each time of prayer at Taizé includes a time of silence of five to ten minutes. The silence is both communal and personal. No instructions, meditation techniques, or other spiritual practices are suggested. Prayer and reflection are perhaps assumed, but the way one spends time in silence is very much up to the individual. Silence is an obvious movement towards a listening stance and receptivity to the still, small voice of God deep within. Silva Steuernagel speaks of silence as both posture and performance within worship noting “the performance of silence as a performance of reverence.”¹⁶ My sense and hope for the time of silence as experienced in prayer at Taizé is that it is an active and engaged silence, one that performs a sacred action of reaching out, moving towards, and receiving. There is a reciprocity to the silent prayer.

¹⁵ I first visited Taizé several years after graduation from college after I had begun serving as a pastoral musician in a parish. Over the years, it has been my regular practice to return every two years. Each time, the common song has impressed me as both a rehearsal and performance of Christian unity with the many pilgrims who find themselves living out a week in Taizé.

¹⁶ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 82.

In one of my earlier visits to Taizé as a young adult, I remember Brother Francis of Taizé speaking briefly at the daily bible introduction about silent prayer as a reaching out to God and allowing God to reach out towards and within us.¹⁷ He brought an image of the “Creation of Adam” by Michelangelo to the bible introduction as a visual aid for the young adults to see and consider as they engaged with silence both in and as prayer.¹⁸ Another function of performing silence is to create internal space that allows one to recognize the present moment and the participation of God’s life of communion present deep within. The repetitive singing of the Taizé chants has a capacity to bring stillness and foster receptivity in silence. The continuous chanting allows participants to psychologically move from “head” space to “heart” space, and to “center.”

For Silva Steuernagel, surrogate participation, the fourth mode, is the act of participating on behalf of those who are absent from the assembly, singing and praying for others who are present within the assembly but unable to sing and pray, and participating in a time of prayer for those who cannot.¹⁹ Surrogate participation can also mean mentally bringing and including others in the prayer through recollection, intention, and the act of intercession, thereby praying for others and the world. Additionally, surrogate participation is often enacted by choirs, cantors, and other musical groups performing on behalf of the assembly.

At Taizé, surrogate participation is occasionally performed by a small group of singers who are invited to sit together to provide gentle animation and support as a choir typically would in various church music contexts. In most assemblies, there will always be persons who for a variety of reasons are not able to fully participate. Some may not be able to sing or participate

¹⁷ In addition to the daily bible introductions offered to visitors staying at Taizé, in recent years the Taizé Brothers have been offering online bible meditations. This video invites pilgrims to prepare for the Lenten season and is offered by Brother Francis of Taizé. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOiy1_jsycw (accessed January 18, 2024)

¹⁸ <https://www.michelangelo.org/the-creation-of-adam.jsp> (accessed December 23, 2023).

¹⁹ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 83–85.

due to feelings of sadness, grief, joy, or surprise, or may need to simply pause to absorb a particular moment and be present to the experience before them. This pause might involve noticing and hearing voices singing around you, observing a ritual action before you, being surprised by a word or phrase, or sensing “a still, small voice” (1 Kgs 19:12–13) deep within your heart, you might even be moved by the Holy Spirit. Practically, a typical service mostly consists of repetitive chanting, it is natural to take a break or pause from singing. Even at Taizé one can witness a brother or two in the community who may not be singing during a particular chant at a particular time! Surrogate participation can also be discerned in the brothers of the community who offer a multi-layered performance of unity: physically and emotionally present, sitting together in the central area of the church, singing, praying, exhibiting a common witness of communion, and finally, offering their prayer and very lives for the unity of the world.

The notion of singing and praying for those who cannot or for those who are absent is also connected to the action of interceding for the life of the world. Christians are called to intercede for others. We carry the needs and burdens of others in prayerful hearts. Silva Steuernagel also includes the experience of lament when speaking of surrogate participation.²⁰ In general, Christian worship today is lacking in providing prayerful spaces for lament to be safely welcomed and rendered in common prayer. Lament can entail the recognition of brokenness present within the lives of assembly members present for worship and may also include the those who are absent. Our prayers of lament also include the greater collective lament of a world torn by division, pain, and brokenness, crying out for healing and transformation.

I recall a particular week at Taizé with several pilgrims present who were living with serious physical and cognitive disabilities. Several of these pilgrims spent most of their days in

²⁰ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 83.

wheelchairs assisted by attentive caregivers and family members. Most of these pilgrims were non-verbal. For me, these individuals and the persons who cared for them bore witness through their physical presence in the church during the time of prayer. Their physical presence was indeed a form of prayer and participation. Were the caregivers performing surrogate participation for those who were in wheelchairs? Were those in wheelchairs performing surrogate participation for others in the space and beyond through witness and physical presence? Thus, in Taizé, surrogate participation is potentially experienced in a broader sense as we pray for others both present and not present within the liturgical assembly. Even for those who are praying for others, there is the possibility of others praying on behalf of ourselves in those instances where we are caught up elsewhere or taking a break from the common action before us.

The fifth mode of participation is immersive spectatorship. Silva Steuernagel describes this mode of as the action of moving beyond the boundaries of Sunday worship and engaging in church music in other activities of life.²¹ Taizé is clearly a boundary crossing place of sorts. The music and spirit of Taizé have found their way to large and small communities throughout the world. Through the distinctive songs of Taizé, a simpler pattern of worship has “moved” through the world as a vehicle of unity. Prayer using the songs of Taizé has inspired worship on days other than Sunday, with various communities offering regularly scheduled times of prayer devoted to praying for unity and reconciliation.

During a week in Taizé it is not uncommon to hear small groups of people of varying ages singing Taizé songs while doing chores such as dish wash up after meals or gathering with a few friends and singing Taizé songs together in the village church with its amazing acoustic. Taizé chants are memorable and can stay with you as an ongoing prayer carrying you throughout

²¹ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 86.

the day. As pilgrims return home from Taizé, they take the experience and songs with them and share them with others. For most, the week has been an immersion in prayer, song, and community.

Immersive spectatorship is also apparent through the world-wide distribution of recordings of Taizé chants via CDs, YouTube, various streaming platforms, and the presence of chants in numerous Catholic and Protestant hymnals in varied churches throughout the world. Since the time of the Coronavirus pandemic, a weekly live-streamed Saturday Evening Prayer from Taizé has enabled and welcomed thousands to take part in the prayer virtually.²² Through the various live-streams, recordings, and social media platforms, digital bridges of connection are formed for those who are unable or choose not to be physically present. For those unfamiliar with the Taizé Community, they also provide an initial connection and introduction. For those who have spent time in Taizé, the weekly livestreams provide a meaningful virtual connection and allow those who lead similar adapted prayers throughout the world a chance to re-engage with what has been for many a highly formative ecumenical experience of Christian unity.

In all five of the modes of participation, Silva Steuernagel reminds us that they can and do overlap from time to time.²³ Thus, in Taizé, unity is performed in a myriad of ways through the engaged participation of all who live and choose to visit the Taizé Community. For some who have been impacted by the experience of unity and communion at Taizé, there is the desire of bringing the experience to one's local context—taking the experience of prayer and replicating it in other places.

²² See the Taizé YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/@taize/streams> (accessed December 20, 2023).

²³ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 85.

Bringing the Spirit of Taizé to Oak Park, Illinois

One of my most spiritually formative connections made as a young adult was my first visit to the Taizé Community in France several years after college. I was already working as a pastoral musician and knew very little of Taizé outside of a few songs bearing its name. I had also experienced a time of prayer using the songs of Taizé offered at a conference for pastoral musicians.²⁴ It was in Taizé that I experienced a deep moment of integration between liturgy, contemplation, ecumenism, and mission. My experience in Taizé was a conversion experience of encountering Christ in prayer, song, and community. Leaving Taizé, I wanted to find a way to share the experience with others.

Over thirty years ago, on October 2, 1992, several years after having made that first visit to the Taizé Community in France, I began to consider the possibility of gathering people together for a time of prayer and song in the “spirit” of Taizé. I, along with the support of the parish pastoral staff at Ascension Church in Oak Park, IL, began inviting people to come together for a time of prayer, song, and silence on the first Friday of each month. This was born out of my desire to pray with these simple songs and to bring together and welcome persons from different Christian communities and traditions. Throughout the years, what began as a small gathering of thirty persons, or so, eventually grew, with five to seven hundred gathering for prayer each month. Sadly, like most public worship, all of this ended with the onset and shutdowns due to the pandemic in 2020. After the shutdown, the return to in-person worship was a gradual process that initially prohibited most congregational song. After many months and finally being free to

²⁴ The National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) over the years in both regional and national conventions has regularly offered a time of Prayer using the songs of Taizé. Many of the early prayers were animated by Robert Batastini. As former Senior Editor emeritus for GIA Publications, Batastini collaborated with the Taizé Community to bring the songs of Taizé to the United States and other parts of the English-speaking world.

reengage with prayer that allowed for communal song, the regular monthly prayer “In the Spirit of Taizé” began again with monthly attendance slowly building up again. Attendance now hovers just above three hundred each month with several hundred joining via live-stream or viewing the recording later on the parish YouTube channel. The monthly live stream is an on-going commitment and provides for another layer of connection and involvement in the monthly prayer.

Since the beginning of the Oak Park monthly prayer in 1992, preparing and adapting a prayer using the songs from Taizé has followed this basic outline provided by the Taizé Community.²⁵

Preparing a Time of Prayer with Songs from Taizé

One or two opening songs of Praise

Psalm

Reading

Song

Silence

Intercessions or Litany of Praise

Our Father

Concluding Prayer

Songs

Post-prayer, a short time of sharing may take place in another space²⁶

²⁵ In addition to the written resource “Prayer for Each Day,” the following links provide additional information from the Taizé website for preparing a prayer using the songs of Taizé.

Preparing a Time of Prayer with Songs from Taizé at https://www.taize.fr/en_article337.html (accessed November 20, 2023). Preparing a space for a meditative prayer, https://www.taize.fr/en_article339.html (accessed December 16, 2023). Icons in worship, https://www.taize.fr/en_article340.html (accessed December 16, 2023).

Songs and meditative singing https://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique2603.html (accessed December 16, 2023).

²⁶ The outline suggests an additional time for sharing or reflection after a prayer. While small groups of persons tend to linger post-service each first Friday at Ascension, Oak Park, there has never been an organized attempt to set up a space to allow for a more intentional time for sharing and reflection.

The above outline is brief and offers few rubrics. Concise suggestions are provided on the Taizé website. From the start of the monthly prayer in Oak Park, variations in posture (i.e., regular places where the assembly is invited to stand or sit) and ritual actions have been played out within the context of the basic outline. In contrast, the usual adapted pattern of prayer in Oak Park is this:

In the Spirit of Taizé, Oak Park

Three opening songs

Sharing of Light (with instrumental music) All stand.

Psalm with Alleluia (“*Christe Jesu*” during Lent)

Reading

Song and Procession of Light to the altar area

Silence (10 minutes)

Intercessions or Litany of Praise

Our Father (recited with all joining hands)

Concluding Prayer

Concluding Hymn*

Sign of Peace

*Several times during the year, the service concludes with Prayer Around the Cross accompanied by additional Taizé chants.

All who participate in the monthly prayer are given a candle and a simple worship aid (little more than a song sheet) for the service when they enter the church.²⁷ The worship aid includes all the songs and includes brief commentary and instructions for different parts of the service.

²⁷ See sample “In the Spirit of Taizé” worship aid from Oak Park, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oO6WxgG7kuZJbH6b6cY-p5rNhHkKkPgM/view?usp=drive_link

As I reflect upon the monthly experience of prayer in Oak Park through the lens of Marcell Silva Steuernagel's five-fold typology or modes of participation in church music, I find both prayers to be very similar, with several exceptions as compared to the experience in Taizé, France.

Considering the mode of presence, the goal has always been to prepare a welcoming space for people to gather and allow them the space to be present to God in prayer and song. "In the Spirit of Taizé" in Oak Park is held on the first Friday of each month except for January, when the prayer is offered on the evening of January 1st to commemorate the World Day of Prayer for Peace. Additionally, the Oak Park prayer also gathers at 3:00 PM each Good Friday for Prayer Around the Cross. As we live in a time where attending church regularly is more conscious choice than obligation, more countercultural act than presumed cultural activity, attending the ecumenical service in the spirit of Taizé on a Friday evening is, for most, an intentional choice to gather and participate in a prayer for peace, unity, and reconciliation. First Friday prayer "In the Spirit of Taizé" is always consists of a mix of persons, Protestant and Catholic, young and old, clergy and laity, pro-choice and pro-life, LGBTQ+ and straight, politically conservative and liberal, from large churches, small churches and no churches, those who attend regularly, along with others attending for the first time.

The Oak Park gathering often includes visiting Protestant and Catholic youth groups, small groups of young people who are preparing for confirmation in various traditions as well as young college students and theology and worship studies students from predominately Protestant colleges in the area. The choice of first Friday as a monthly time and evening to gather was chosen as the best choice as it is free night for most persons requiring a choice and intention to

attend. Friday was also chosen to not compete with prayers and other offerings scheduled at other churches.

The second mode of singing is similar in both France and Oak Park. As in France, the prayer in Oak Park consists mostly of repetitive singing except for a strong metrical hymn that concludes most services. The common song is notable as each month brings a brand-new assembly of regulars and newcomers to the service. Singing together, as one, in this monthly context is both a primary ritual act and embodied performance of unity. The brief five-minute song practice and welcome time that precedes the start of the service provides for a moment to become familiar with the sound of the assembly gathered on this night that will sing together for the service. The initial welcome time and short song practice provide an informal moment for a brief explanation of the prayer and creates a welcome space to join in the common song.

In the American context, common song can be a challenge for groups of people who have never worshipped or prayed together before. Singing can be a vulnerable act. However, the intention to be present on a Friday evening inspires the common song at the monthly prayer. The repetitive chanting is a new experience for many who attend for the service the first time. For those who are reluctant or not accustomed to singing, the song continues through those who fully embrace this experience. In Taizé and in Oak Park, singing is a performative practice of unity: singing to God, singing with/for others, and singing for the world.

Christians have been singing and chanting for nearly two millennia. Singing unites and joins others together in a common practice of prayer. Singing allows for the feeling and experiencing of disparate emotions. Common song has power to quell fear, strengthen resolve,

and enact unity. Robert Gass speaks of five elements fostered through singing and chant that affect our consciousness: anchoring, entrainment, breath, sonic effects, and intent.²⁸

Anchoring connects thoughts, feelings, and memories as we sing. Through text and melody, we are anchored and grounded in the experience of song. Each Taizé chant utilizes a brief text from scripture or writing from the saints. Through repetitions of both text and tune, a mini prayer of sorts is performed, with grounding and centering capacities for the singers.

Through the process of entrainment, the repetitive, “mantra-like” nature of a Taizé chant aligns and synchronizes our inner rhythms like two swinging pendulums locking together in rhythm as one. Entrainment also includes the synchronization of breath.

Breathing together in common song alters the way we breathe and connects both mind and body to breath. In common song, as we begin to breathe and sing together, a physical and spiritual unity of sorts is established within the context of prayer.

Sonic effects include the tonal and vibrational characteristics present in the act of singing as a chant impacts our body and energy. The acoustics within the space also come into play. Additionally, Taizé songs can be performed utilizing a variety of textures that allow for a variety of sonic effects. These can include unaccompanied or accompanied singing with the layering of a variety of instruments, and the over-laying of cantor verses for certain chants. Finally, the intent or intention of the singer or singers has greatest impact when we engage and connect our own desires and will to the layered action of song that includes text, melody, and other harmonies. This layering creates a plurality within the unity of the singing event.²⁹

In Christian practice we speak of singing as praying twice. Praying twice suggests intensification, a going deeper. Taizé chants easily become conduits for the experiencing of these

²⁸ Robert Gass, *Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 1999), 48.

²⁹ Gass, *Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound*, 48–56.

five elements of singing. The short Taizé songs can be likened to sung mantras, which can allow for the singer to go to a deeper spiritual place, moving from “head to heart.” In the words of the Taizé Community:

Singing is one of the most essential elements of worship. Short songs, repeated again and again, give it a meditative character. Using just a few words they express a basic reality of faith, quickly grasped by the mind. As the words are sung over many times, this reality gradually penetrates the whole being. Meditative singing thus becomes a way of listening to God. It allows everyone to take part in a time of prayer together and to remain together in attentive waiting on God, without having to fix the length of time too exactly.³⁰

Oak Park assembly members engage in the third mode of silent participation in two primary ways. All who enter church on a first Friday evening are invited to observe silence prior to the service. Additionally, each monthly service includes a ten-minute period of silence for prayer and reflection observed at the mid-point of the service. The silence is palpable. This is perhaps due to the rather engaged chanting and the procession movement with candles that precedes the silence. Some have reflected over the years that they most appreciate this time of silence to become grounded and centered in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. For some, it is perhaps the only time in the month where they intentionally stop for a time of total stillness and silence in the context of prayer.

The mode of surrogate participation is noticeable at each prayer in Oak Park as there are always newcomers who may not be accustomed to a large group setting for common song. While, at times, I have observed people not singing, there is a reassuring sense that everyone is singing around them, taking up the song. While there is no choir, a small ensemble of instrumentalists, joined with a cantor or two, primarily accompanied by piano, all discreetly animate and provide support and encouragement for the singing.

³⁰Community of Taizé, “Meditative Singing,” https://www.taize.fr/en_article338.html, (accessed January 15, 2024).

During the service, the prepared intercessory prayers demonstrate a heightened sense of interceding for everyone around the world who have experienced or are experiencing brokenness, division, or who need healing. This is also apparent at the end of the time of the common intercessions when people are invited to offer spontaneous prayers out loud. At this point, throughout the church space, people express (out loud) a myriad of intentions praying on behalf of the world and all its peoples, especially the voiceless and those at the margins. As Silva Steuernagel states: “Vicarious participation is a way through which congregations perform community. They are carrying the other by performing their voice, and lamenting members are performing the other’s potential suffering through their silence and/or absence.”³¹ Finally, space is provided each month in the intercessions to pray aloud any names of the sick and others entrusted to our care. At this point in the prayer, one can hear a flowing litany of names called out and prayerfully acknowledged and “lifted up” throughout the worship space.

As stated earlier, the fifth mode of immersive spectatorship moves the practice of church music and common prayer beyond the boundaries of Sunday worship. Immersive spectatorship, as performing and engaging with church music in the varied facets of daily life, has a missional capacity. Immersive spectatorship as a facet of performing unity in the context of common ecumenical prayer is realized in the following ways at the Oak Park prayer and beyond the monthly in-person gathering. While immersive spectatorship is most focused on worship and music making outside of the Sunday context, it is notable that we gather for common prayer on the most “uncommon” of nights for church, Friday evening. There is something to be said about a disparate group of people intentionally choosing to come to a monthly prayer on a Friday evening. While most participants attend a regular church, experience has revealed that there are

³¹ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 86.

persons who regularly attend first Fridays who, for a variety of reasons, no longer engage with any other institutional or organized faith tradition. For others, it has become a welcome part of a mix of devotional practices grounded in both contemplation and action.

The first Friday prayer also affords an opportunity for persons to experience a style of worship not found in most Sunday Christian contexts or settings. Some are surprised by the continuous singing, some are moved by the monthly procession with candles, while others are struck by the intentional shared silence. Some are drawn to the leadership of the various instrumentalists who play each month while others feel immersed in the strong and vibrant chanting in two-, three-, and four-part harmony. Most people who attend are aware of the focus and intention of the monthly prayer as an ecumenical service inspired by the Community of Taizé to join our collective hearts and voices in prayers for peace, unity, and reconciliation. Unlike Taizé in France, the monthly prayer in Oak Park typically ends with the singing of a concluding hymn, which is some of the most full and energetic singing of the service. Both the final hymn and concluding prayer have a mission focus as all are blessed and sent forth in mission called to be bearers of light, unity, and reconciliation.

While essentially a monthly experience, it is hoped that the prayer and song can serve as a formative impetus for participants to continue to work and pray for unity beyond the walls of Ascension in Oak Park. In the early years of the monthly prayer, books, icons, and recordings from Taizé were made available for purchase after the service. In the United States, Taizé recordings and other resources are distributed by GIA Publications.³² In 2002, at the request of GIA Publications, several monthly prayers in Oak Park were recorded to prepare a live CD recording. Support and permission for the project was also received from the Taizé Community

³² See Taizé resources available from GIA Publications, Inc. <https://giamusic.com/taize-home> (accessed January 20, 2024).

in France to produce the recording as an American expression of a service that utilized the songs of Taizé. In the early years, we had received various requests for a recording of the service as a way of allowing people to continue the prayer away from the monthly service. The recording, “In the Spirit of Taizé” was released in 2004.³³ The experience of the recording and the popular ways that music is accessed and experienced expanded our understanding of common prayer when COVID-19 impacted our world in 2020 and we were required to create alternative ways of worship.

As pastoral ministers, we are still coming back from the pandemic and increasingly are discovering new learnings from the experience. The worldwide pandemic has been an occasion to realize anew the importance of spiritual ecumenism and to explore new ways of experiencing common prayer. During the time of the initial shutdown, members of the Ascension Choir and other members of the parish music ministry team came together to prepare and record several thirty-minute Taizé style services. Both the reading and intercessory prayers were pre-recorded with the singers gathering in-person observing twelve feet of spatial distancing and singing with masks as required by the COVID-19 protocols.³⁴ Singers and ministers came together, mindful that they were indeed praying on behalf of others. In another example, as choirs were not permitted to sing together on Sundays, a special “COVID” Choir was formed to gather twice each month for a strictly limited one-hour rehearsal, observing the then-current protocols to prepare choral music to send out to the parish community as way to foster common prayer and connection through song. Some of the monthly repertoire included songs from Taizé as that repertoire is an integral part to the overall sung repertoire of the parish on Sundays and beyond!

³³ See recording link. <https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/in-the-spirit-of-taize-recording-cd612> (accessed January 20, 2024).

³⁴ “In the Spirit of Taizé” November in the time of COVID, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs9lwXz7gos> (accessed January 20, 2024). Music recorded with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

One chant from Taizé was the “Per Crucem” offered for the community to prepare for and enter into the Paschal mystery of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum.³⁵ While in-person Sunday worship recommenced with minimal or no congregational singing on June 28, 2020, in-person monthly “In the Spirit of Taizé” did not resume until March 5, 2022. This was also the beginning of the monthly “In the Spirit of Taizé” live stream,³⁶ The ongoing monthly livestreams for the service in Oak Park have proven to be an essential addition to the ongoing ecumenical prayer outreach and provides another level of participation and community connection. As the monthly in-person numbers continue to slowly approach the pre-COVID numbers, interestingly the livestream views continue to grow each month. The New Year’s Day prayer in 2024 felt very similar to prayers we had celebrated pre-pandemic.³⁷ The service included over four hundred people participating in person with over three hundred joining in prayer via livestream. While most chants sung throughout the year are drawn almost exclusively from the Taizé repertoire, as at Taizé the January prayer included several carols for the season of Christmas.³⁸ The familiar carols included on New Year’s Day provided a level of familiarity to the participative goal of the service.

As with the prayer in France, so with the prayer at Ascension, the five categories of participation are variously present, overlapping and joining together to create a performance of unity. A week in Taizé provides for ample time to grow in and discover unity. In contrast to a week spent in Taizé, the monthly prayer service lasts approximately one hour. Aside from the

³⁵ COVID Choir singing “Per Crucem” by Jacques Berthier, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L3qDuBARrQ> (accessed January 15, 2024). Music recorded with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

³⁶ Oak Park “Taizé” initial livestream March 5, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sUmUtVYTAE> (accessed January 15, 2024). Music recorded with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

³⁷ January 1, 2024, Prayer “In the Spirit of Taizé” for the World Day of Prayer for Peace, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0uiW-WULJ8&t=1923s> (accessed January 15, 2024).

³⁸ In Taizé most of the music sung at the three daily prayers is drawn mostly from the Taizé song repertoire. Additionally, the brothers for many years have included chants from the Orthodox tradition, the psalmody of Joseph Gelineau, and several seasonal carols for Advent and Christmas.

common prayer that is crucial to spiritual ecumenism, the monthly event can only accomplish so much in terms of moving towards unity considering the three dialogues of love, truth, and life. While the dialogues are certainly “echoed” in small ways through the monthly prayer, more time is needed to accomplish a strong experience of ongoing dialogue.³⁹

The final section of this chapter will address ritual differences celebrated each month in Oak Park as compared to the daily prayer in the Taizé Community. Additionally, regular participants of the Oak Park Prayer who have spent time in Taizé were invited to comment on their experience of the Taizé Community in France and their experience of the prayer at Ascension, noting commonalities and differences. Several participants were interviewed in person while others responded via email. Participants were invited to respond to two questions. The first question invited participants to compare both experiences of prayer (France and Oak Park), noting both similarities and differences. The second question focused on the Oak Park prayer specifically and invited reflections on ecumenism. Participants were asked if there was a connection between singing or any other ritual action or other element within the service that celebrates, prays for, enacts, or performs unity. The original text of the questions is provided in the footnote.⁴⁰

³⁹ Over the years, the monthly prayer has offered an annual “Taizé” retreat morning focused on proposals offered from the Annual Letter from Taizé. In terms of outreach, the monthly prayer also accepts a free-will offering each month that is shared with various ecumenical and interfaith charitable organizations in the Chicagoland area.

⁴⁰ Two interview questions: Comparing the time of prayer in Taizé and in Oak Park

Question one: As someone who has visited and spent time living and praying with the Taizé Community in France and having also participated in the monthly prayer “In the Spirit of Taizé” in Oak Park, I invite you to offer comments/insights on differences and similarities between the two prayer experiences.

Question two: If possible, I invite you to offer any of your experiences (from the monthly service) that would make a connection to singing (or any other non-musical detail, element, or action within the service) as an experience or event that celebrates, prays for, or enacts (performs) unity and ecumenism.

In all, eight persons were invited to share feedback. Six replied. Of the six, two respondents are young adults, one having visited Taizé several times and another living and serving as a “permanent” volunteer for three months in Taizé. One respondent is a seasoned pastoral musician and liturgist who has visited Taizé France on several occasions and who also leads a regular time of prayer in the spirit of Taizé at his parish. Another respondent is a current choir member who visited Taizé on one occasion. The fifth respondent is a college professor and former parish choir member and cantor who made one week-long visit to Taizé. Lastly, the sixth respondent is a former pastoral associate of the parish and current choir member who has visited Taizé twice. The following section includes responses from the interview respondents considering and comparing aspects of the monthly prayer “In the Spirit of Taizé” with the prayer in France. This section focuses on the practices particular to the adapted form in Oak Park.

Taizé France and “Taizé” Oak Park: Similarities and Differences in Ritual and Song

When initially adapting the experience of prayer from Taizé to the community in Oak Park, the main consideration was to create a monthly service that would welcome all Christians to a common prayer consisting mostly of singing Taizé chants along with a reading from scripture, ensuring a significant period for silent prayer, and concluding with intercessions and the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. From the beginning, the goal was not to replicate the prayer as celebrated in France but to translate and adapt the experience for a local parish context. Adaptations to the monthly prayer that differ from the common prayer in France include: a welcome time and song practice, the use of different postures, the sharing of light and candle procession, the concluding hymn and sharing of peace. Additionally, I will comment on the less

frequent observance of the Prayer Around the Cross, the prayer leadership team and musical leadership.

Ascension and St. Edmund Parish is primarily white with a wonderful mix of other ethnic groups. It is a fairly progressive Roman Catholic parish community residing in the more liberal and progressive village of Oak Park. The student body of our thriving parish school is primarily white with currently 22% of the students being of Hispanic origin and another 8% of the students being of African American descent. Other ethnicities are represented in an additional 5% of the student body. The village borders on Chicago's economically challenged and primarily African American west side. As a village, Oak Park has a strong interfaith collaborative group known as the Community of Congregations.

Welcome and Song Practice

As a monthly prayer, the assembly is different each month. The Oak Park Prayer has always begun with a time of welcome and a brief explanation of the service, offering a few words directed to the intent of the service "In the Spirit of Taizé." Typically, one of the songs is practiced with all present. The assembly might learn a canon or another four-part chant. Through this, the assembly finds its voice and the people hear themselves sing in harmony. The initial time of welcome and song practice offers an experience of hospitality that can put the gathered assembly at ease, especially those attending for the first time.

One respondent similarly echoed these thoughts when commenting on the initial welcome time.

At Ascension the music is taught or reviewed before the service begins. This serves to focus the assembly and to welcome those who are unfamiliar with the music. The richness of the sound invites even people unfamiliar with the music to participate, since they will be supported and not feel exposed, as they might with only a few others singing.

She names the welcome time as an opportunity for the gathering to hear their common voice united in song, even unfamiliar songs. She speaks of the quality of the common song and sees it as both invitation and entry point for participation.

Postures: Sitting and Standing

As at Taizé, most are seated for most of the service. From the start, I decided to vary the posture from one of mostly sitting to include two times when the assembly would stand. (Sitting in pews for an hour seems overly passive.) In Oak Park, after being seated for two to three gathering chants, all stand for the sharing of light (where all light congregational candles) that includes the singing of the Psalm and a recurring Alleluia. In addition to standing for the Alleluia and Psalm, it is the custom in Oak Park for each person to raise their candles high during the singing of each Alleluia acclamation. All are seated after the psalm for the scripture reading. The assembly also stands for the final part of the service that includes the Intercessions, Free Prayer, Lord's Prayer, Concluding Prayer, and Final Hymn. For the Lord's Prayer, all are invited to join hands and move into the aisles.

One respondent, a choir member at Ascension, had this to say about posture in the monthly prayer.

While we are seated for most of the service and most of the people sit in the pews, I like that provision is made for folks to sit on the floor on carpets and use the meditation

benches or cushions as they are able. This reminds me of my experience in France. It has an informal and relaxed feel. There is a certain freedom and simplicity to sit around the open spaces at Ascension.

For this respondent, the attempt made at Oak Park to allow for seating options other than pews provides for a more relaxed and less formal feel to the service. There are no pews in Taizé.

While long benches are available on the sides of the space for those who need them, the majority sit on the floor or use simple meditation benches. Making a simple connection about posture between both France and Oak Park strengthens the notion of the simplicity and a more informal style of prayer. While the majority of Oak Park attendees do sit in pews, the other option points to the simplicity and uniqueness of the prayer.

Sharing of Light and Procession of Light

Even though the Oak Park service is on a Friday evening each month, a night in Taizé that always includes Prayer Around the Cross, I opted instead to include a service of light with a candlelight procession. The procession is accompanied by song to the altar area where the icons are situated, creating a focus for prayer and meditation. Once at the altar area, assembly members place their candles in containers of sand situated near the various icons. The idea to place containers of sand near and around each icon for candles was inspired by my visits to Orthodox Churches. Practically, it also seemed anticlimactic and not ritually strong to blow out candles.⁴¹

For me, it was a natural progression of the idea to create a ritual action (particular to the monthly prayer) that could enact a communal symbol of light leading into the time of silence.

⁴¹ The individual taper candles used on Saturday evenings in Taizé are designed to stay lit for a limited time and eventually go out within ten to fifteen minutes.

The procession with candles being placed in the central space has become a notable visual symbol of the service, setting the stage for the time of silence. The ritual action also allows for a variety of interpretations and levels of meaning for each participant in the procession.

One respondent notes:

This simple ritual action is comfortable for most people, and everyone who participates (which is most people) seems to place the candle deliberately and prayerfully. The tapers remain lighted until after the service ends, providing a warm glow (there are several hundred candles) for a period of silence.

For this respondent, the ritual action is accessible and comfortable. The action can have multiple meanings. Several hundred candles being placed in a common area creates a visual sign of unity for all who take part in the service. Another respondent provides an important insight for both prayers.

The sheer size of the crowd in Taizé, France is part of what makes it an intense communal experience. But I feel that too in Oak Park when I'm sitting in my spot up front aware of a large crowd behind me that I can't see unless I turn around, which I don't. But I can see and feel them as they come up to bring their candles and it's my favorite part of sitting on the prayer bench in front of the front row of pews. I like the feeling of being surrounded by so many people with the same intention.

For him, there is intentionality and a sense of presence woven in to the ritual movement of the procession. He can “feel” the assembly behind him as they move and sing in procession.

A young adult respondent who spent three months volunteering in Taizé also comments on the passing of the light:

One of my favorite parts of my time at Taizé was on Saturday evening during the spreading of the light. It fills me with great hope to see that parable of spreading the light to friends and strangers through the flame of the candle, and I am very grateful that we

do that at Oak Park as well. It means a lot also that there is the emphasis on children/youth, and their role in helping us find/spread that light.

In Taizé, the sharing of the light takes place at the end of each Saturday evening prayer. This portion of the service is referred to as the Celebration of the Resurrection. It is reminiscent of the sharing of the light of Christ at the annual Vigil of Easter and has a specifically resurrection focus. While there is no procession at Taizé, the passing of the light to hundreds of pilgrims throughout the church creates a visual expression of journeying together in the light of Christ. The respondent notes the sharing of light between both strangers and friends perhaps reminding all that we are united through Baptism and in other ways whether we know the person next to us or not. He beautifully makes the connection of children having a specific role to help us both “find and spread” the light. In Oak Park as in France, children are invited to pass the light for the service. The Oak Park prayer also invites young adults to share in this ritual.

Concluding Hymn and Sign of Peace

The Oak Park prayer typically concludes with a metrical or refrain style hymn with a strong text usually focused on mission or unity. The concluding hymn is typically the most engaged and robust singing experienced at the service. The Oak Park prayer also typically concludes with a formal Sign of Peace. On months where the service concludes with the Prayer Around the Cross, there is no formal conclusion to service. As Taizé chants accompany and continue until have come to pray around the Cross, both the Concluding Hymn and Sign of Peace are omitted.

Another respondent occasionally attends the Oak Park prayer and leads a regular time of prayer using the songs of Taizé at his local parish community. Speaking on the concluding moments of the Oak Park service, he notes:

There is a palpable energy to the singing with the Oak Park prayer experience; this reflects the pastoral work that many Christian Churches have engaged for many decades of building robust community singing, and that Catholics (in particular) will recognize as an expression of the familiar phrase “full, active, and conscious participation.” The large gathering of Christians who make their way to Oak Park each first Friday is joyful, intentional, and communally expressive. The Oak Park gathering concludes with a Sign of Peace and time for shared conversation. This serves as a bridge between the formal prayer of Christian unity and a lived experience of people connecting with each other, expressing joy at one another’s presence, and concern for those in need of support.

For this respondent, there is an integration and overlapping of the various modes of participation.⁴² He touches on engaged singing, intentional presence, community connection and mission. While the Oak Park prayer needs to consider more ways to connect outside of the prayer, this respondent connects the sharing of the sign of peace with the community conversation and sharing that is possible after the service.

Prayer Around the Cross

Prayer Around the Cross, is a significant weekly event positioned at the end of each Friday evening prayer in Taizé. It is reminiscent of Good Friday with each Friday, Saturday and

⁴² Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 85.

Sunday in Taizé celebrating a miniature Holy Week. The Taizé Community describes the ritual prayer this way:

From the beginning, Christians have recalled each week the deepest mystery of their faith, the “passover” from death to life that Christ undertook and that he continues to undertake in the lives of human beings. Every week can thus conclude with the celebration of the dead and risen Christ. Prayer around the cross is a way of expressing an invisible communion not only with the crucified Jesus, but with all who suffer—all the victims of abandonment, abuse, discrimination, or torture, all those condemned to silence. In the center of the church, the icon of the cross is laid flat, resting on a couple of low stools and illuminated by a few candles. While the meditative singing continues, those who wish to do so come up to the cross to pray. They can make a gesture, such as placing their forehead on the wood of the cross, as a sign that they are entrusting silently to Christ all that burdens them as well as the difficulties of other people both those they know personally and those who are far away: the oppressed, the ill, the poor, the persecuted.⁴³

At Ascension, Prayer Around the Cross takes place four to five times each year at the conclusion of the monthly prayer. This decision was made early on as we experimented with the sharing and procession of light. I chose that as the primary ritual action for each month (over the Prayer Around the Cross). The ritual action of the prayer around the cross is both communal and personal as it celebrates the paschal mystery—the dying and rising of Christ. Except for the Good Friday Service which takes place in the afternoon in Oak Park, the sharing of light and procession are also included on the evenings where Prayer Around the Cross takes place. While there were initial concerns that two larger ritual actions might be “ritually” too much within one monthly service, time and practice have proven that both ritual actions celebrated within the same service (four to five times each year) seem to flow well. The video clip linked in the footnote offers a glimpse of several ritual actions at the March 2024 Lenten Oak Park “Taizé”

⁴³ Taizé Community, *Prayer for Each Day* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 1998) 6–7.

service. Ritual actions include: the sharing of light, procession with candles, Lord's Prayer, and the Prayer Around the Cross.⁴⁴

Prayer Leadership

As is the case with the daily prayer in Taizé (aside from Sunday Eucharist), there is no official presider of the monthly prayer. Instead, a small team of prayer leaders (all women) alternate the preparation and leading of the intercessions, invitation to the Lord's Prayer, Concluding Prayer, and Invitation for the Sign of Peace. One to three volunteers read the scripture reading each month, usually proclaimed in at least English and Spanish.

Musical Leadership

The monthly prayer is accompanied by piano with a variety of instrumentalists present each month. The core team of instrumentalists include flute, oboe, guitar, and string bass. Several instrumentalists receive a modest stipend each month. Additionally, other instrumentalists join in from time to time. One or two cantors assist each month with the singing of the psalm and any chants that require over-lay verses. Early on, a conscious decision was made to not form a special "Taizé Choir" preferring to not create any type of choir and assembly divide. Ascension Church has always had a strong choir program as part of its music ministry. Over the years,

⁴⁴ Taizé Sharing and Procession of light, Lord's Prayer and Prayer Around the Cross, March, 2024. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JcySPJmEGFX1ZfvJgombfR8d3bfxtKBe/view?usp=sharing>
Music recorded and live streamed with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

many choir members have freely chosen to take part in the monthly prayer adding their voices as part of the assembly.

One respondent, a young adult professional from the Chicagoland area shares her thoughts on different aspects of the monthly prayer:

A meaningful part of common prayer for me is being able to sing together within a large group. Letting my voice and mind float in and out of focus. Allowing myself to meditate and pray or try out new voice parts or languages. The community in Oak Park sings passionately just as those gathered in Taizé do, and I am so grateful for it.

I also appreciate that monthly prayer utilizes different languages for the chants, a variety of musical instruments, and that scripture is read in at least two languages when possible. This brings a sense of unity and a reminder that while all Christians are not all the same, we share the same faith and the same scripture.

For this respondent, she is strengthened and encouraged by the large group singing with and around her. The size of the group and the common songs allows her to experiment and move “in and out of focus.” Indeed, others sing for her as she is moved to pray and meditate in different ways. This respondent in some ways, views the entire service as a collage of unity, with the many elements joined into one service celebrating a common faith. Commenting on the ecumenical character of the service, she concludes:

When thinking about ecumenism and the monthly prayer, I find myself reflecting that I have no idea the background or denomination of those I offer peace to, or those I exchange candlelight with. I don't know if they are lay people or clergy. It doesn't matter. We are all there because we believe in the gospel and find meaning in this prayer tradition. Taizé can be for all, and all are welcome at Taizé. Both in France and in Oak Park!

The monthly prayer “In the Spirit of Taizé” has always strived to welcome all. Each person is brother, sister, and friend. There is a consistent effort to welcome all without judgment,

regardless of confessional beliefs and stances. The monthly prayer strives to be gracious and hospitable in every text and song that is proclaimed. It is both a rehearsal of communion and celebration of unity. Perhaps our other young adult respondent says it best:

Similarly, I think the large amount of people gathered and so many people singing all together in one spirit is very powerful. It's a unique way to participate and express communal hope and joy. I think this creates the effect of a tapestry of diversity that weaves together in unity. For me, there is a limitation to what words can express/do/communicate, and I think singing, like liturgy, can cultivate movements of participatory unity and ecumenism that works in a deeper way in our mind/body/spirit than conversations/words might be able to.

For him, the monthly gathering is both powerful and transformative brought about through the communal performance of the prayer. He speaks of the power of ritual and song joined together creating “a tapestry of diversity that weaves together unity.” His words speak of a “moving towards” unity, through the actions of cultivating, moving, and participating. For myself, the work of Christian unity is about discovering the unity that already exists in Christ. The work of Christian unity and ecumenism weaves together both prayer and mission sending forth believers to engage in efforts that bring about restoration and healing.

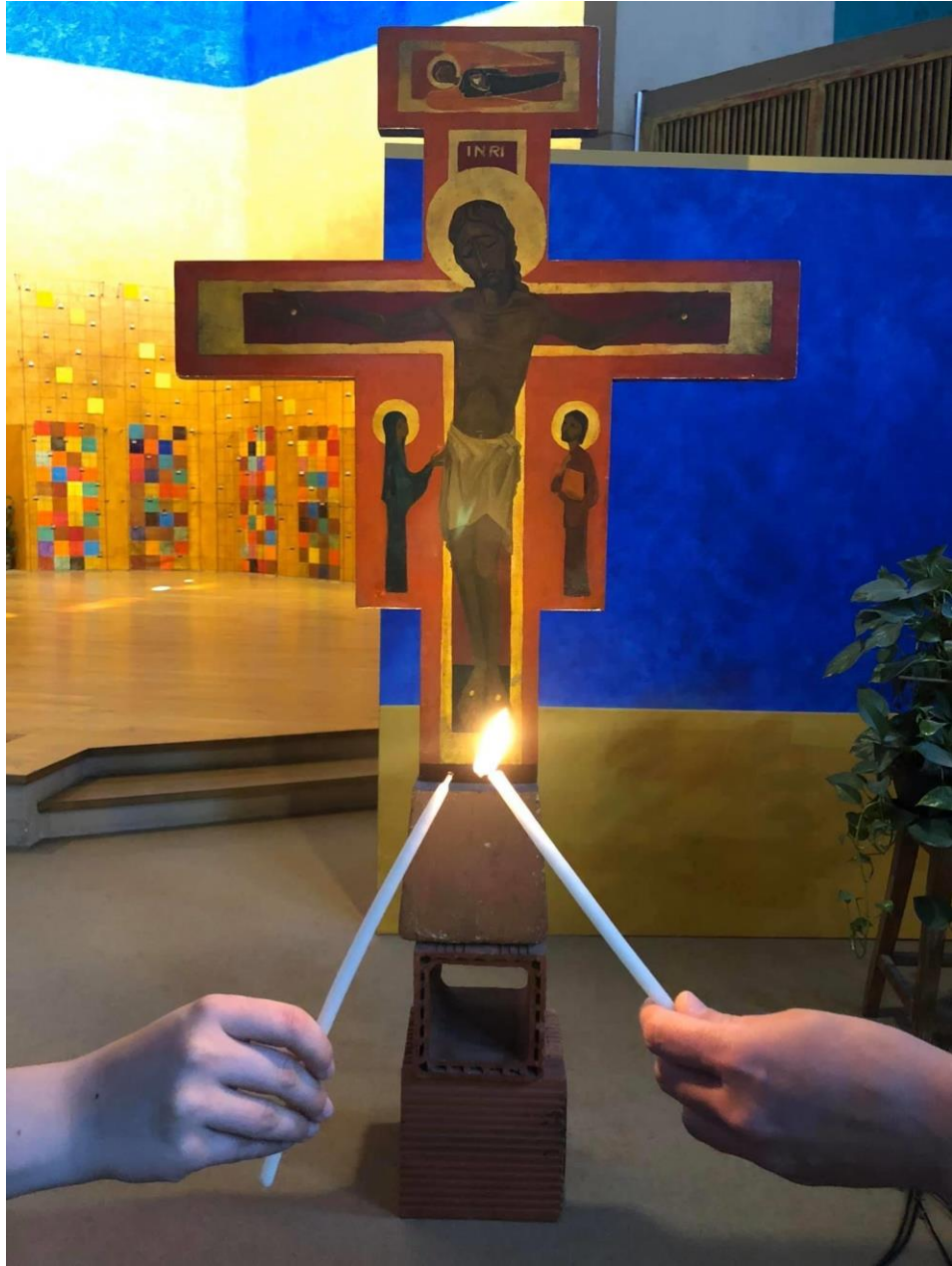
Citing commonalities and differences provides both affirmation and challenge as the Oak Park prayer continues to be attentive to the ecumenical spirit of the Taizé Community and to the many who choose to gather each month. The brothers of the Taizé Community also continually seek ways to follow the movement of the Spirit as they continue to welcome thousands each year in a stance of radical hospitality, openness, and simplicity.

This chapter considered the prayer of two communities from two different countries. Both welcome all to engage in a performance of unity by participation in common prayer and community through presence, singing, silent participation, surrogate participation, and

immersive spectatorship. Comparing an ecumenical experience of prayer, song and community enacted over the course of one-week to a monthly ecumenical experience that lasts just over an hour is also a call to be attentive to what is truly possible. Both places provide a place for performing unity with varied levels of participative intensity and engagement.

Moving forward, it is important to be open to the energy and movement of the Holy Spirit as we strive to grow in communion. Prayer is both formative and performative. Baptized Christians are a thirsty lot, and disciples grow thirsty along the way. United in mission through the waters of Baptism, we too offer Christ's living water freely to the world. Our common prayer for unity allows for spaces of "waiting" and for "running towards," both satiating our thirsts and propelling us forward.

In chapter four, I introduce a new time of prayer that seeks to address concretely the need for healing and wholeness in our churches and the world. I propose that the need for healing and our individual and communal woundedness are the places where unity can begin to be performed through our common prayer.



Icon cross, Church of the Reconciliation, Taizé

CHAPTER 4: HEALING PRAYER AND HEALING SONG
A New Ecumenical Prayer Outreach to Unity and Reconciliation

*Only you, O God, and you alone, the broken heart console.
Only you, O God, and you alone, the wounded world make whole.¹*



Healing Prayer, Healing Song candle procession, visio divina, and anointing.

In chapter three I examined the common prayer and ecumenical vocation of the Taizé Community in France along with the monthly prayer, “In the Spirit of Taizé,” at Ascension Church in Oak Park, Illinois. Both prayers were considered as “performances” of unity through

¹ Susan Briehl, “Only You, O God” Text: Susan Briehl, Tune: BALM IN GILEAD African American Spiritual arr. by Marty Haugen © 2003 GIA Publications, Inc. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX80oco0_L8 (GIA Publications studio recording.) The song is also featured at a HPHS service in February, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vr8pytD0p68&t=2401s> (accessed February 15, 2023). (The hymn cues at 28:50.) Music recorded and live streamed with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

the lens of Marcell Silva Steuernagel's five modes of participation. In this chapter, I describe a new ecumenical prayer outreach begun in February 2023, designed, and performed as a regular time of prayer within the local context of Ascension Church, Oak Park, IL. *Healing Prayer, Healing Song* (hereafter HPHS), is a service that seeks to join healing prayer and communal song with the performance of ecumenism and unity. Embracing the work of ecumenism in the modern world entails both healing and restorative work—healing and restoring the rifts and division within the Body of Christ. This service attempts to pray and sing for the healing of all that divides us.

I begin with the organizing vision for this new prayer and then describe the formation of an ecumenical prayer team. I then present the format and shape of the service along with the music chosen and performed by the assembly and choir. I also include an explanation of the items (candles, icons, images, and other reflective art) included in the main altar area that serve as a reflective gallery of sorts and a locus for prayer and reflection. Additionally, I describe the prayer stations and their use situated throughout the altar area used for ritual prayer and anointing. I conclude with interview feedback for the service offered by various prayer team leaders and participants/choir members as we discern the continued growth of this outreach and the possibilities for this service in the future.

The Vision for a New Ecumenical Prayer

After decades of preparing and animating a monthly service in the spirit of Taizé, I began to think about the possibility of offering a new ecumenical service in my local pastoral context. What type of ecumenical service would be a natural outgrowth of the regular monthly service in

the spirit of Taizé? In this post-COVID reality, with people still experiencing increased isolation and the reality of an impoverished experience of human touch, might a service focused on healing, wholeness and unity attract believers and non-believers alike? Was there a need for a service that might more concretely name and pray for the division and brokenness in need of healing, wholeness, unity, and the restoration of relationships? Could such a time of prayer become a new form of outreach for performing ecumenism?

As an outgrowth of the Taizé-styled monthly prayer, this new ecumenical service, HPHS, would retain some of the gentle flow and style of the service. As an evening service it would include several elements familiar to the adapted Taizé style service in Oak Park, including a service of light and procession with candles. Also, I was intrigued by the idea of connecting prayers for Christian unity with healing and began to consider the ecumenical possibility of ritually enacting a service of healing that included individual prayer, the laying on of hands, and ritual anointing with oil. While the practice of anointing the sick is perhaps most familiar in the Roman Catholic tradition as the Sacrament of the Sick, many Protestant traditions also celebrate orders of prayer centered on healing and pastoral care of the sick that include ritual anointing and the laying on of hands.²

While the Oak Park “Taizé” style service utilizes mostly chants from the Taizé Community, the common song selected for the assembly at the healing service would include a variety of genres (metrical hymns, African American spirituals, short songs, global songs etc.) to accompany the ritual actions of the service and demonstrate the unifying and healing power of

² See for example: *Book of Common Worship: Pastoral Edition*, (Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) “Service of Wholeness for a Congregation” (Louisville: KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 354–366. *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, “A Service of Healing I” (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 615–621.

music. As with the monthly Taizé styled service, the main altar area platform would be set up with various elements and religious art to provide a focal and interactive space for prayer and reflection. The healing service would also utilize a small ecumenical prayer team of ministers (lay and ordained) who would provide the opportunity for individual and communal prayers for healing that included a ritual laying on of hands and anointing with oil. As an ecumenical service designed around the theme of healing, I was inspired by the words of Cardinal Walter Kasper: “Only in the context of conversion and renewal can the wounded bonds of communion be healed.”³ The wounds created by the ongoing scandal of division within the worldwide Body of Christ present in all the churches continue to cry out for healing. All are affected by the divisiveness and polarities both inside and outside the church. These wounds affect both Christians and non-Christians alike. It’s a common theme expressed among various contemporary theologians and spiritual writers. Richard Rohr, OFM, names these divisions and calls all to an engaged movement towards restoration and wholeness:

Polarities, dualisms, and seeming opposites are not opposites at all but part of a hidden and rejected wholeness. The task of true religion is to rebind (in Latin, *re-ligio*) that which is torn apart by temperament, ignorance, and institutionalized evil. Christians are led and grounded by Jesus the Christ, “in whom all things can be held together ... and in whom all things are reconciled” (Colossians 1:17, 20).⁴

Another Franciscan voice calling for healing and renewal is theologian and scientist, Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF. She challenges the institutional church to go beyond the preservation of institution to calling all (both inside and outside of the church) to deeper conversion and transformation. For Delio, the Church is internally fraught with division and fearful of change.

³ Walter Cardinal Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2007), 11–12.

⁴ Richard Rohr, “Daily Meditations” <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/repairers-of-the-breach/> (accessed October 21, 2023).

As both scientist and professor, she finds that the opposition of religion to science and evolution marginalizes and limits the credibility and authenticity of the Church. This leaves many Christians no option but to leave the institutional church and seek out other privatized forms of spirituality that continually fragment the Body of Christ.⁵ Delio states: “Nothing really binds us together, and we find ourselves in a world of fear and resistance. We are skeptical of any new reality because we fear that rearranging our lives will disrupt the comfortable niches we have come to inhabit.”⁶

While Delio’s church context is Roman Catholic, her words find resonance for the many and varied churches that form the Body of Christ. Thus, the new service in Oak Park would more robustly name and pray for the healing of the many wounds and divisions present in both church and world.

Forming an Ecumenical Prayer Team

As a healing service that names and performs prayer addressing the overwhelming woundedness of our world, one of the initial goals for the service was to recruit and develop an ecumenical and multicultural prayer team. The primary task of the team would be to offer prayer, attentive listening, laying on of hands and anointing as one of the focal points of the service. Recruitment of possible healing prayer team members began in October of 2023. The goal was to gather both lay and ordained ministers from different Christian traditions who would serve as a healing prayer team during the monthly services.

⁵ Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2021), xii.

⁶ Delio, *The Hours of the Universe*, xii.

Over the years, the monthly “In the Spirit of Taizé” has attracted quite a few pastors and pastoral ministers from various churches who have become regular attendees. These pastors were my first choices in terms of recruiting an ecumenical prayer team. The primary duty for each team member would be to assist with the anointing and laying on of hands during the service. Team members would also need to be comfortable praying spontaneously with others and utilizing a prescribed text for use with anointing the forehead and laying on of hands upon those who came to their prayer station. The ritual would offer a mixture of spontaneous prayer, the laying on of hands, and use an ecumenically sensitive and inclusive anointing text for the ritual anointing of each person’s forehead. I initially studied and compared the healing and anointing rites of both Roman Catholic and various Protestant traditions. In the end, I adapted prayers from both the New Zealand Prayer Book and the United Methodist Church giving each healing minister the option of two different texts.⁷

One of the ongoing goals for the Healing Prayer team is to be ecumenically, culturally, and ethnically diverse. The current team is primarily white with one member who is African American and one student pastor from India. The initial team was initially comprised of nine members. Currently there are ten, with seven women and three men. Four are ordained pastors in different traditions and six laywomen (including one Roman Catholic religious sister) have ministered in various areas of pastoral care. The denominations represented by the prayer team include Baptist, Roman Catholic, Christian Reformed, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ. (See Appendix B.) In addition to the prayer team, an ethnically diverse

⁷HPHS anointing texts for ritual use by the Prayer Team.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hSHDZO815ba6joUo4nNnjmy9WFc5uYHU/view?usp=drive_link

small group of young adults drawn from both the parish community and beyond serves as lectors and prayer leaders.

The Format and Order of Service

As I discerned the format and flow of the service, the following elements were deemed most important: Gathering, Proclamation of the Word, Intercessory Healing Prayers, Healing Ritual, and Sending Forth. The basic service order has been consistent for each service and includes the following elements.⁸

Gathering hymn/song/chant

Opening Prayer

Scripture reading

Psalm (or other song)

Scripture reading (optional, poetry may also be substituted)

Song of light (passing of the light)

Healing litany/intercessions

Procession of light (with song)

All are invited to process to the main altar area and place their candles in the vessels near the icons and other sacred images. Those who wish may remain and linger awhile to pray for healing for themselves, for people known to them, and for all who suffer. All are invited to prayerfully engage with the images and objects that surround the altar area. The images and objects call us to pray for racial justice, for an end to gun violence, for victims of mass shootings, for LGBTQ+ safety and inclusion, for those living with mental illness, for care for our fragile earth, for an end to war, and for our journey together through this life into the heart of God. Ministers are available at six prayer stations located around the altar area for individual prayer, laying on of hands, and anointing for anyone who would be comforted and strengthened by this ministry.

⁸ HPHS Worship Aid

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Z3AOqVh6x3AD0LeHgZh4TcxqlMHqyDM2/view?usp=drive_link

All the while, the singing continues (various songs are utilized during this time)
Shared Silence (5 minutes)
Choral Meditation (sung by the Healing Choir)
Lord's Prayer (All stand and are invited to join hands)
Concluding Prayer, Final Blessing, Sending
Sending song, chant, or hymn
Sign of Peace

The service loosely follows a Service of the Word and includes elements particular to an evening service as well as the inclusion of a time for the ritual laying on of hands and anointing with oil. As this service is an outgrowth of the monthly “Prayer in the Spirit of Taizé,” several elements particular to that prayer including the sharing of light and procession with candles were retained as a connecting point to the new healing service.⁹ (See link in the footnote.) Depending on the month or liturgical season, the service would be thematically prepared around a primary scripture reading(s), most often a healing story narrative selected from the Old and/or New Testaments.

To prepare the assembly to enter in and celebrate the service, the following explanatory text was prepared to offer a context for the celebration. These notes are included in the worship aid for each service (or as an insert) of *Healing Prayer, Healing Song*. The worship aid is also provided on the YouTube link for those participating virtually.¹⁰

⁹ Candle Procession HPHS, February 2024, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_U_GqUH18sE7V0GtV-CjfRyIplc9ktYT/view?usp=sharing Music and live stream with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

¹⁰ YouTube link for HPHS service and worship aid November 16, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uol-sKYXS54&t=2917s> (accessed February 10, 2024). Music live streamed with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

The members of Christ's body are a community of believers who offer Christ's healing in body, mind, and spirit. We do this in imitation of Jesus. Through our common baptism, we are called to be instruments of healing for all people in any kind of need.

We heed the words of the letter of James: "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord" (5:14). As Church, we are called to pray for one another; our gathering is one way to respond with and for one another. While some may need to walk alone for a time, we are a community called to carry one another to Jesus for healing.

Sadly, we live in a world where some people still equate sickness with a kind of divine punishment. The Gospel is clear that a person's sin does not cause disease (John 9). God is present in the midst of sickness and embraces us with healing. The works of God are manifest in our midst through ordinary elements like water, light, mud, oil, and touch.

Praying and Singing for The Healing of All that Divides Us

We Christians live with the divisions and brokenness that still exist among our ecclesial communities. In our prayer tonight we actively sing and pray for the unity that Jesus called for when he prayed, "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

At the same time, we pray for unity and healing for people of faith in traditions other than Christian, and for those who profess no faith—unity and healing for all humanity. Common song is a source of healing; it can create a bond of unity among those who pray and sing together.

Healing song has the power to open space within us. "When tears sing, hearts are opened. Open hearts are more susceptible to the pain in, around, and beyond us" (William Blaine-Wallace).¹¹ May this service allow for the creation of new spaces to pray, feel, lament, wait, sing, and heal.

¹¹ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing: The Art of Lament in Christian Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 83.

Musicking for Healing Prayer, Healing Song: Music for Assembly and Choir

The repertoire for each service, includes a variety of song styles with priority placed on music from the African American and gospel traditions. The choice to prioritize African American repertoire has the intention to strengthen the ongoing prayers for the healing of all impacted by systemic racism, racial hatred, and gun violence.¹² The repertoire also includes some bilingual repertoire in English and Spanish and well as short songs and chants from Taizé, the Iona Community, and other global song repertoire. Newer ecumenically themed hymns are selected for each service to expand the ecumenical repertoire of newer texts and tunes focusing on Christian unity, healing, justice, and the restoration of relationships. (See Appendix A for a listing of mostly newer hymn texts and tunes appropriate for ecumenically focused services, including texts that focus on healing and wholeness.) Each service has consistently included one Taizé chant to connect the two ecumenical prayers offered at Ascension Church.

The Role of the Healing Choir and Instrumentalists

From the beginning, the service has included a choir of twenty-five to thirty-five singers that supports the assembly song and has performed specific choral pieces that use texts that sing of healing, justice, restoration, and wholeness. The pieces are performed recognizing the healing power of music. The idea to have a regular choir present to assist in the leadership of the communal song was designed to allow for the creation of choral space for the singing of music

¹² HPHS, February, 2024, Choir and assembly singing “Stop By, Lord,” by Doris Bettis, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H6D1F4r7iqvlG3hmXvM6aAPZpovPE2IF/view?usp=sharing>
Music recorded and live streamed with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

that could be an entrée to the sacred. In every service, the Healing Choir performs a selected piece of choral music on behalf of the assembly. It is sung as an offering to the assembly (and God). The choral offering potentially creates emotional space for others to experience healing through the acknowledgement of any feelings of pain, lament, and brokenness present on the journey towards healing.¹³ The Healing Choir is mostly comprised of members of the Ascension Choir. Select members from the other two choirs of the parish also sing as well as several cantors within the parish music ministry. We also currently welcome several singers from the wider Oak Park church community to sing.¹⁴ (See link in the footnote for a recording of the Healing Choir.) The service is accompanied by piano. We also have two regular instrumentalists who have consistently played for the services. The cellist is a hospital chaplain, and the flutist is a certified therapeutic musician. The primary cantor for the service is a board-certified music therapist who practices in a children's hospital setting.

The Main Altar Area: Locus for Healing Prayers, Lament, and Reflection

The altar area in Ascension Church, Oak Park, is a circular platform that includes the main altar of the church space. Assembly members can easily sit on three to four sides of this area. This space is used to create a visual prayer focus for the service. The prayer space around the altar has open space allowing for the placement of various items that create a reflective

¹³ Several choral anthems chosen in the past year include: "Come to Me" by Dan Forrest © 2019 Beckenhorst Press; "Shelter Your Name" by Danielle Rose © 2001 World Library Publications, a division of GIA Publications, Inc.; "O Love" Text: George Matheson, Music: Elaine Hagenberg © 2016 Beckenhorst Press; and "God Has Work for Us to Do" Text: Carl P. Daw © 1996 Hope Publishing Company, Music: Mark A. Miller © 2012 Choristers Guild.

¹⁴ Healing Choir singing "Do Not Be Afraid" by Philip Stopford.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DfYa5J63vbqh1AkS4UgSNSm6FfeZamVQ/view?usp=drive_link
Music live streamed with permission under OneLicense.net. #A-704567.

gallery of sorts for engaged prayer and reflection. Participants at the service are invited to prayerfully engage with the images as a form of *visio divina* or sacred seeing. Items are placed all-around this circular platform area as no prayers are offered from the altar.

As the art and environment for the service was considered, the idea was to provide a space that would include Christian symbols and contemporary iconic art. (The monthly service in the spirit of Taizé at Ascension has consistently used a large Icon Cross from Taizé and three to four other traditional icons spatially located on the quadrants of the circular altar space.) Like the monthly Taizé styled prayer, clay pots filled with sand are also placed around the space near the cross and other icons and images. Candles are placed in the pots during the procession of light.

For the service, I found contemporary images to evoke and name specific issues in need of healing in our world. Primary symbols include: a large wooden cross, a large bowl of water, a large candle, and a small flagon of oil. Additionally, other images were acquired to evoke prayers for lives impacted by systemic racism, racial hatred, and gun violence. Photos of African American women and men killed by police officers are also included. African American sacred images were also sought out as we continue to expand and acknowledge varying and more inclusive images for God as Father and Creator, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Other images represent prayers for LGBTQ+ inclusion, mental health healing and awareness, care and stewarding of the environment, and our earthly journey. With the tragic war and violence taking place in Ukraine and Israel–Palestine, other images were added such as a Ukrainian flag and photos of children from Israel and Palestine. Most images included in this space have a description of the art and artist. The images have become a gallery for prayer, creating space intended to encourage reflection, allowing for expression of lament and prayers for healing.

See link in note 15 for a gallery of reflective and iconic art with descriptions.¹⁵



¹⁵ Reflective Gallery HPHS, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OT6tZT2uZKieLss-odP8EfO41yR4Rp74/view?usp=drive_link

Individual Prayer Stations: Moments of Healing, Human Touch, and Encounter

Integral but spaced apart from the main altar area are six individual stations for prayer, laying on of hands and anointing. These stations surround the prayer space at the margins of the open area surrounding the altar. The individual stations include a small, tall table that holds a candle, a vessel for anointing oil and a prayer card with the ritual anointing text. A prayer team member is at each station as assembly members approach the minister for prayer.¹⁶

All in all, the main altar prayer space and the individual prayer stations create a space for the performance of unity and healing. It's a free and multi-layered space allowing for all to enter in and engage on a variety of levels. The light procession with candles leads all to the main altar area. This is perhaps the heart of the service, with all singing (combining layers of vibration, text, harmony, and differing voices), processing and walking together, some lingering in prayer and reflection, others engaging in brief conversation in the space, others praying together with one of the prayer team members being listened to, named, touched, and anointed with oil. It's an active performance space of sorts. This communal time is less orderly than defined. While not a formal sacrament, the combined ritual event is sacramental and communal, offering a door to the sacred and a window into the heart and presence of the healing Christ. This very active time concludes after the last person has left the prayer station. The ritual song continues until all have returned to their places. What follows is a space for breath and prayer as we engage in five minutes of

¹⁶ Photos of anointing stations.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/159AD_8W6jJ9MxzsyUtT6cIk_bUM_JVZJ/view?usp=sharing
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pXsZthsTJLwelusRhSboxFQMKpIQBHZj/view?usp=sharing>

shared silence and prayer. The time of silence concludes with the choral anthem selected for the evening's service sung by the choir.

As I continue to reflect upon the levels of possible engagement with the prayer space and the ritual prayer available to all at the prayer stations, I turn to William Blaine-Wallace who offers five expressions of lament-based prayer: refract, be still, wait patiently, stay curious, and cloak suffering.¹⁷ While the HPHS service is not specifically a service of lament, expressions of individual and communal lament are both possible and present. The expressions of lament are potential spiritual practices that can be engaged by assembly members within the service.

Blaine-Wallace uses the word “refract” as we try to engage with the horror and trauma found in a broken world. The prayer gallery at the monthly healing service allows participants to engage with iconic art that represents very difficult realities of brokenness. For Blaine-Wallace: “Art bends terror into color, shades, and stories that we can stomach in the service of a heart open in the hurricane.”¹⁸

The second expression calls us to “be still.” To be still is to engage in any sort of contemplative practice. Blaine-Wallace reminds us: “Being still does not mean staying still. . . . Prayerful contemplation is whatever slows down, stills, and opens our hearts to who and what matters.” Varieties of “staying still” are certainly evident at HPHS as assembly members engage with the main prayer space, with each other and for some, with the prayer team.

“Waiting patiently” is the third expression and implies an active and engaged waiting. In this expression, Blaine-Wallace reminds us that we can expect too much from contemplative prayer.¹⁹ This is where spiritual “practice” comes into play, with the discipline (for discipline’s

¹⁷ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing: The Art of Lament in Christian Community*, 91.

¹⁸ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing*, 92.

¹⁹ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing*, 94.

sake) of sitting and waiting as an experience of prayer not dependent on any type of feeling or emotion. The brief five minutes of silence experienced at the healing prayer perhaps offers this chance to simply wait, together as a community.

Blaine-Wallace calls us to “stay curious” as an engaged practice to move us past our expectations, assumptions, and the personally self-sufficient agendas we bring to our prayer. One possible way that HPHS engages with the practice of “staying curious” is through the prepared intercessory prayers that articulate and entrust or surrender the many needs and cries for healing into the loving embrace of a healing God. For Wallace: “Waiting curiously helps contain the fear, repulsion, and terror that are evoked by the cruciformed in our midst.”²⁰

Finally, Wallace encourages us to “cloak suffering” as a practice to allow God to heal and love us. The cloaking of suffering is not avoiding the reality of suffering but allowing God to heal and embrace us. For Wallace, “Being cloaked in love, regularly, opens our hearts wider for lamentational relation, allowing us to see more fully the eternal now that beholds us.”²¹ I am hopeful that the HPHS service provides different spaces for the cloaking of suffering, especially in the individual interactions with the prayer team and through the varieties of musicking within the service.

²⁰ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing*, 95.

²¹ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing*, 97.

Healing Prayer, Healing Song: What Is the Healing We Seek?

As I prepared for the HPHS services, questions about the nature of healing came up on several different occasions from various persons within the planning team. One person simply asked: “What kind of healing are we going for?” It was a fair question. Those offering a service of prayer that promotes healing prayer and healing song should continually grapple with questions about the nature and experience of healing. I took these questions to the monthly Zoom meeting with the HPHS prayer team. They too, offered questions. What does it mean to be healed or made whole? What is the healing that people seek for their lives, for the world? What constitutes healing? What is the Christian community’s role in healing? Why should a church offer regular healing services, let alone ecumenical healing services? Together, at monthly Zoom meetings, we offered our insights into the need for healing in our lives, our local faith communities, and our world. We spoke and prayed about wounded souls being made whole. We recognized that each of us were continually called to be the healing hands of Christ in the world. As Christ reached out in healing, so too, his disciples, were called and sent out to “cast out demons and to heal all diseases” (Lk 9:1) We in turn, as the baptized, are called to heal as Jesus did.

Roman Catholic theologian, Mary Healy, reminds us that twenty-one percent of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ public ministry are devoted to reports of his physical healings and exorcisms.²² As a theologian, Healy works out of a charismatic context being deeply involved in the Catholic Charismatic renewal within the Roman Catholic tradition that especially prizes the healing ministry as an essential charism of the Holy Spirit. As healing was connected to Jesus’

²² Mary Healy, *Healing: Bringing the Gift of God’s Mercy to the World* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2015), 26. Dr. Healy is professor of Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, MI.

mission so too for us as Christians. Healy travels around the world with lay Catholic evangelists from different parts of the world where she preaches and serves on different charismatic faith healing teams. For Healy, “Jesus ultimately came to heal humanity's deepest wound: the wound of our sin and consequent alienation from God, with all its consequences of spiritual and physical brokenness.”²³

Throughout the centuries, the church has always been at the forefront of the healing arts and care for the sick. Individual saints throughout the church’s history have been praised for their ability to bring healing to those who suffer and to cure diseases, sometimes performing miraculous cures. Numerous religious orders of men and women have been founded and formed to care for the poorest of the poor and sick. Following the example of Christ, hospices and hospitals, and eventually entire healthcare systems and missionary associations have sought to bring the healing presence of Christ to the world.²⁴ In the Roman Catholic Church, most of these outreaches were initially staffed by religious orders of women and men and later Protestant outreaches were realized and staffed though denominational church-sponsored medical and missionary societies as well as Protestant deaconesses dedicated to the healing vocation. John Tangelder reminds us of the earliest calls for the establishments of hospitals in “A history of healthcare. . . and why Christians have done it different.”

The first ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325 AD directed bishops to establish hospices/hospitals. Although their most important function was to nurse and heal the sick, they also provided shelter for the poor and lodging for Christian pilgrims. They were prompted by the early apostolic admonition by Christ’s command that Christians be hospitable to strangers and travelers (1Pet. 4:9).²⁵

²³ Mary Healy, *Healing*, 30.

²⁴ John Tangelder, “A history of healthcare...and why Christians have done it different,” *Reformed Perspective*, September 21, 2018, <https://reformedperspective.ca/a-history-of-healthcare-and-why-christians-have-done-it-different/> (accessed February 8, 2024).

²⁵ Tangelder, “A history of healthcare.”

The development of church-sponsored healthcare systems in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions have sometimes eclipsed the necessary and important ministry of healing in the life of ordinary Christians in parochial settings. David Hilton (1932–2008), former associate director of the WCC’s Christian Medical Commission wrote:

The impressive achievements of science have led many of the churches to abdicate the Lord's mandate to be in healing ministry. Since wholeness of life is a central issue of the Christian Gospel, the churches have an important role to play in leading a movement towards the development of a comprehensive healthcare system in which all aspects of health have an appropriate place—which is focused not only on saving lives but on wholeness of life.²⁶

Hilton also offered a critique of health care in our contemporary context saying: “The development of modern scientific medicine has led to the depersonalization of medical care and an emphasis on curing rather than caring.”²⁷ This remains an ongoing critique in our contemporary American context as many seek more wholistic medical care. Lizette Larson-Miller, theologian at The School of Theology at the University of the South, comments on three operative medical models still present in contemporary medical practice. Larson-Miller, in her book, *The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*, includes a brief discussion of the biomedical, biopsychosocial and biopsychospiritual models of medicine present in late twentieth century practice.²⁸

In the biomedical model, health care practitioners are believed to treat the disease over the person, thus exhibiting a relational distance between the health care practitioner and the patient. This approach favors curing over healing. In the biopsychosocial model, a more

²⁶ David Hilton, “Health and Healing,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. Nicholas Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 450–451.

²⁷David Hilton, “Health and Healing,” 451.

²⁸ Lizette Larson-Miller, *The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 96–97.

wholistic approach is evidenced as the patient's psychological health and other realities present or not present in the personal life of the patient (such as family and other support systems, stress and anxiety levels and any other factors that might affect the overall mental and physical health of the patient) are considered. Finally, the biopsychospiritual model goes one step further and recognizes the spiritual dimension of a person. Within this model, the patient's spirituality, and relationship with God (or not), nature, the inner self, or other beliefs that provide meaning in the patient's life come into play. This model also places value on prayer and spiritual practices in the life of the patient.²⁹ Commenting on the spiritual aspect of health, Hilton wrote:

Most important to health is the spiritual dimension. Unresolved guilt, anger and resentment, and meaninglessness are now being found by medical science to be very potent suppressors of the body's powerful, health, controlling, immune system, while loving relationships in community are among its strongest augmenters. Those in loving harmony with God and neighbor not only stay healthier but survive tragedy or suffering best and grow stronger in the process.³⁰

Once in a graduate course on the Sacraments of Healing (Penance and Anointing of the Sick) at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, Fr. Richard Fragomeni, referencing the ritual anointing of the sick and passionately instructing the class on the power, beauty, and efficacy of the sacrament, said to the class: "In this most beautiful encounter that is realized in the sacrament of the sick, all are healed, all receive healing, all are strengthened, and sometimes, some are cured."³¹ Fragomeni also stressed to the ordination candidates in the class that while in most cases they would eventually be celebrating the anointing of the sick in mostly private contexts (in homes, nursing facilities and hospital rooms), he encouraged all to see the power of the

²⁹ Lizette Larson-Miller, *The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*, 96–97.

³⁰ David Hilton, "Health and Healing," 450.

³¹ Richard Fragomeni, <https://ctu.edu/faculty/richard-fragomeni/> (accessed February 12, 2024).

sacrament not as a privatized moment but in the context of the healing and praying Christian community.

Jesuit priest and theologian Bruce T. Morrill has written extensively on the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*³² and the various rites dealing with death in the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

Writing within his Roman Catholic context, Morrill challenges us to reclaim the power of the liturgy and sacraments celebrated and witnessed in an engaged community. For Morrill, “Rituals, when practiced in a larger complex of communal worship and pastoral care, afford real possibilities of healing.”³³ Yet, we face the cultural challenge of living in a culture that tends to privatize and avoid both times of sickness and death. Morrill states: “Americans largely consider sickness shameful and, therefore, a condition preferably kept quiet and managed in private.”³⁴ Blaine-Wallace echoes a similar sentiment referencing a paradox of being human in the world: “Though we belong to the society of the fragile and resilient, we are often slow to embrace God’s invitation for us to bring the more broken dimensions of ourselves into relation.”³⁵

As I considered the import of the *Healing Prayer, Healing Song* service, I became increasingly aware of the vulnerability that such a service would require of an assembly and the individual members. I realized that for some, the service could possibly be too difficult to participate in. As I finalized texts, hymns, and the outline for the first HPHS service in February 2023, Morrill’s words synthesized my hope for this new ecumenical service as a performance of healing and unity.

To bring the suffering born in one’s own person-body or shared in compassionate solidarity with another into the presence of God, to experience an encounter with Christ

³² Catholic Answers tract, “Anointing of the Sick” <https://www.catholic.com/tract/anointing-of-the-sick> (accessed February 13, 2024).

³³ Bruce T. Morrill, *Divine Worship and Human Healing: Liturgical Theology at the Margins of Life and Death* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 34.

³⁴ Bruce T. Morrill, *Divine Worship and Human Healing*, 32.

³⁵ William Blaine-Wallace, *When Tears Sing*, xv.

through the proclamation of word, the sharing of prayer, and the effective touch of symbolic gesture, is to trust that the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ continues to immerse the divine presence into the depths of our human condition. Salvation comes not in magical escapes from reality, but rather in a renegotiation of our place in this world—before God and people—according to the paschal mystery.³⁶

Morrill’s words continued to inspire as I considered a variety of ways (striving to honor individual comfort levels), for assembly members to engage in prayers and rituals for healing, for themselves, for others, and for the world enacted in the light and embrace of a gathered community. Finally, Morrill recognizes a broader notion of healing when he says, “Healing comes through doing actions that, even if only as verbal protest, seek to enact change in the situation. At the same time, symbolic action (word and sacrament) must function in tandem with medical, psychological, social, and financial assistance.”³⁷

Thus, HPHS, strives to welcome believers from differing denominations and spiritual contexts to a time of prayer that seeks to perform healing and unity through intentional participation that utilizes presence, singing, silent participation, surrogate participation, and immersive spectatorship.³⁸ The HPHS service also seeks to rehearse and restore unity and wholeness in the context of an ecumenical service devoted to healing—healing prayer and healing song for the world, healing prayer and healing song for all that is divided and broken, healing prayer and healing song for all who yearn to be whole, to be one!

³⁶ Bruce T. Morrill, *Divine Worship and Human Healing*, 36–37.

³⁷ Bruce T. Morrill, *Divine Worship and Human Healing*, 31.

³⁸ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 73.

The HPHS Feedback Questionnaire

Choir members and Prayer Team members were invited to reflect upon their experiences of the seven HPHS services begun in February 2023 and completed by November 2023 and share feedback by January 10, 2024. (See Appendix C for the survey questions and links to all services via YouTube recordings.) The worship aid for each service is available as a link on the YouTube recording.

All responses were shared via email with several respondents choosing to also meet in person. The initial questionnaire was intended for choir members and other musicians. Prayer Team members were given the same set of questions, adapted accordingly for their role as both assembly member and leader of prayer. In this section, the names of the respondents are not used.

Eight questions were offered. The first question invited respondents to describe their experience and participation in the services. Next, they were asked to comment on the various types of musicking present in the services including assembly song, the healing choir, and instrumentalists. In question three, participants were asked to consider and share feedback on their personal engagement with the reflective images and symbols that formed a reflective gallery of sorts around the altar space. Question four connected with question two concerning the varied aspects of musicking, respondents were invited to reflect upon and share insights on music and communal song as a vehicle or bridge to healing. Question five invited feedback from those who experienced or witnessed the prayer, laying on of hands, and ritual anointing that was offered at the six prayer stations throughout the sanctuary area. Question six invited reflections about connecting prayers for healing with unity. In question seven, participants were asked if they experienced or connected choir and/or community singing with unity (creating, celebrating,

or praying for unity). If so, how? The final questions simply invited any further affirmations, critique, or suggestions. Respondents were free to answer any or all of the questions posed. (See Appendix C, Feedback Questionnaire for Healing Prayer, Healing Song.)

The HPHS Feedback Responses

What follows is a sampling of responses detailing experiences and insights concerning different aspects of the *Healing Prayer, Healing Song* services. I will provide commentary throughout along with a summary at the conclusion of the responses. I received responses from eight of the prayer team members along with responses from fourteen choir members and two instrumentalists. (Typical choir attendance at the HPHS services has been averaging twenty-five to thirty-five singers. The services each month have an average attendance of one hundred including the choir.) The live-stream typically includes forty to fifty views on the evening of the service, with one hundred to two hundred views after the scheduled prayer. (See Appendix D for a curated list of additional feedback responses.)

Experience of and Participation in the HPHS Service

The first question simply inquired about the experience of the prayer from the vantage point of choir member or prayer team member. Both choir and prayer leaders sat and participated in each service from the various sections of the regular pews in the church space. Aside from the choir anthem or the time of ritual anointing, all were engaged in their primary role as members of

the assembly. Additionally, some prayer team members and choir members were sometimes assigned to proclaim a prayer, litany, or blessing. In each service there has never been one main presider of prayer. The ritual texts and prayer leadership are shared by several persons.

One Prayer Team member spoke of her own woundedness as she willingly offered to do whatever was needed for the new service:

I participated in five of the seven HPHS services. I came to them as a Protestant, an ordained minister, a stranger to the Ascension community, without any experience of working with David other than as a receiver of his Taizé leadership and music. I had no idea what to expect as far as the process or potential for the service. And I came to this bruised by my own church experiences and had some hesitation over stepping into another experience of being visible in a church setting. As a prayer leader, I was also participant and receiver, the experience has been heart-filling and beautiful.

In the monthly zoom “Prayer team” meetings to prepare for the upcoming service, many on spoke of the reciprocity of giving and receiving as both minister and assembly member. Others spoke of the need for personal healing after years of professional ministry (in both lay and ordained contexts) spent ministering to others.

One choir member, who lives farther from the church than most, wholeheartedly supported the service with her time, voice, and presence.

I participated in all of them. All of the carefully chosen music, not only the choral selections that the choir sings, expressed my sentiments and prayer. Learning and singing the songs at rehearsal helped the meaning to ‘sink’ deep into my soul. The service has been a balm for my soul.

For this choir member, who has spent years serving in healthcare ministry, the service brought both meaning and healing. She also had the advantage of rehearsing for the service allowing texts and melodies to sink deep within. Her comment about the rehearsal of music affirms what directors of choirs know to be true. The church choir rehearsal is a multi-layered song event full of possibility offering a time of learning, prayer, joy, and transformation.

Musicking: Assembly Song, Choir, and Instrumentalists

Both choir and prayer team members had many things to comment upon concerning the various modes of musicking present through each service. One pastor specifically spoke of the healing aspect of the choral anthem prepared for each service. Her comments distinguish the assembly song and the surrogate participation that is enacted when the choir sings (for and on behalf of others) within the context of a service.

Letting the choral pieces—the words and music and voices—wash over me became another avenue of healing. The choral pieces had their own power, different from congregational singing or Taizé chants.

Another pastor on the team cites the transformative power of both choral and assembly music for its ability to build community and enact unity. Music can draw us out and move us toward others. Common song can gently unite not only voices but hearts longing to be named and known.

Choral music and congregational singing have the capacity to build community among participants even when we come from different communions and congregations. The individual participant is taken out of their isolation and anonymity to become part of a greater whole and unity in the body of Christ. This visceral and “felt” knowledge is powerful and transformative for participants.

The notion of common song as “visceral and felt” challenges us to intentionally engage in the act of common song together. We do this together or on behalf of those who can’t.

Engagement with Reflective Images and Symbols

The reflective “gallery” has been a work in progress since the time of the first prayer in February 2023. Each month following has provided time to find additional pieces of art and other images to foster reflection and prayer. This experience of *visio divina* or sacred seeing within the

context of the service shows promise and possibility as the service continues to grow and evolve.

At this point, there are enough images and objects that focus on specific healing needs of our world. We are at the point of needing to choose or curate the appropriate number pieces for a particular month. One respondent through her comment implied an important question of “how much is too much?” I am encouraged by the reactions to the reflective and sacred art pieces that surround the altar area.

The following participant comments provide for a variety of perspectives for engaging with the space. For one prayer team member:

Art is an avenue into the unconscious, non-rational realm for me, so the art, icons, and dressing of the central space were central elements of the service. My only wonder is whether there's a critical mass when there's enough, when there are more than the heart can take in. The challenge is that what kind speaks to me may not speak to someone else.

For another choir member, the reflective space around the altar offers a “display of brokenness.”

The icons, images, and art, glowing in the candlelight created by the attendees makes the focus of those in need of healing, besides myself, so real! They “display” the brokenness present in our world, our sacred earth, as the images lay at the foot of the altar.

In a sense, the entire assembly through the candle procession and placement of candles around the varied images brings light to the brokenness. Perhaps the procession and joining of the candles in the common area can offer an image of healing light shining on all that is in need of restoration. The participants in the service have a role in creating the visual art of the reflective space.

Another pastor noted:

I found the reflective images to be highly appropriate for prayer around the altar and noticed some members of the congregation taking photos of them on their cell phones.

Several respondents cited specific images and how they choose to spend time at each service reflecting before certain pieces. The worship aid offers an instruction for participants to

“spend time, linger” and prayerfully engage with any of the pieces around the altar area. One team member offered the following reflection:

The variety of images represented is thought and prayer provoking. One piece in particular from Mexico, “Procesión al Cielo,” (Procession to Heaven) represents a parade or procession of people up a tall mountain—reminding me of our journey of life toward our eternal life—that message is important in dealing with grief and life’s difficulties; Isaiah’s prophecy of God’s high mountain with all nations streaming to it—a sense of overcoming differences and joyfully coming together in unity. Another piece that drew me in is “Jesus of the People.” Each month as I spend time before it, I find it expanding my image of Christ. The candles that surround the space represent to me hope, unity, and community.

For her, several of the pieces and even the candles surrounding the area, called her to unity through the experience of spending time before a particular piece.

Similar and different sentiments are shared by one of the cantors for the service:

I most enjoy the Mexican painting (“Procesión al Cielo”) of all the people processing. Also, I like the Mexican art piece that represents Mother Earth as a nursing mother. I enjoy engaging with all the pieces that reflect our call to celebrate and care for creation. I do appreciate that they are in different areas of the altar space and feel the right ones are there—images calling for social justice, Black Jesus (Jesus of the People), ending gun violence, protection of the earth. The music and the reflective art together create a setting and place to ponder. Together, we literally create and engage with the visual and auditory space where we are given room and a space to pray, to heal, and become one. Beauty opens the door for it.

For this respondent, she mentions the various pieces being grouped in an intentional way in the space. She speaks and senses an integration and collage of communal participation as kinetic, visual, and auditory. She speaks of beauty as a door, perhaps to the holy.

One of the HPHS instrumentalists also highlighted the “Procesión al Cielo” by Mexican global artist Nicolás de Jesús.³⁹ He offered this comment.

³⁹ See image, *Procesión al Cielo* <https://www.etsy.com/listing/1595951526/procesion-al-cielo-de-nicolas-de-jesus> (accessed February 24, 2024).

Of the various reflective art pieces, “Procesión al Cielo” depicting the long up-to-heaven trail of people going back and forth on the rectangular painting was my favorite by far and I always look for it. It gives me a sense of my uphill journey some days but ultimately that I hope to ascend to heaven with this community of marchers!

This respondent mentioned “looking for” the reflective piece and highlights ongoing engagement with a particular piece as an aid to reflection and prayer. He also highlights the unitive experience of the common journey we make together as one, marching (and singing) in the light.

Music and Communal Song as a Vehicle to Healing

I received many comments on the question of music and communal song as a conduit or vehicle to healing. I include six responses in this section.

The first comment is from a choir and HPHS team member.

I find choir and community singing to be very powerful. I often feel joy. When we sing together, we tune our voices to each other, requiring sensitivity to others, creating power in united voices. It helps me to feel connected to others and strengthens feelings of being part of a group. Connections to others—an important component in health and mental health.

I recently saw a documentary “Alive Inside” <https://www.aliveinside.us/#land> about music as a therapy for people with dementia and psychiatric disorders and the organization Music & Memory. It was an amazing testament to the healing power of music!

This response speaks to the unitive process in common song that requires the “tuning” of our voices together and being sensitive (listening) to those around us. She cites joy, connection, and power, and celebrates the healing and communal power of song.

The following brief comment from one of the HPHS cantors highlights breath and pulse.

To sing together you must breathe together; you experience the same pauses, pulse, and rhythms. Singing together with others is very unifying.

For this choir member, music connects with all of our emotions. She speaks of intention and the communal and unitive effect of common song.

I've always felt an emotional connection with community/choir singing both in joyous celebrations and at times of loss and need for healing. Though hard to explain, I've often become unexpectedly moved while singing and seeing how the music enhances our (choir and community) shared experiences and draws us all together more intentionally.

This prayer team member speaks of voices tuning together and joining in harmony as a model and sign as we embrace our missional call.

We tune our voices to each other, perhaps allowing us to be more sensitive to each other. We sing in harmony, perhaps encouraging us to live in harmony. Our voices together are powerful and purposeful—a model for what we can do together in the world.

For this HPHS instrumentalist, music is a bridge of healing.

In my ministry as a Therapeutic Musician, I see daily, the power of music as a connecting bridge for healing. Music crosses cultural, religious, gender, political and economic differences in ways that equalize all people.

In the final response, this HPHS Prayer team member and pastor describes common song as “being carried” from one experience to the discovery of a new reality together. This comment hints at the possibility of restoration and transformation in worship and song. The “movement” is away from difficulties and challenges that weigh us down and towards the creation of safe places of healing and community.

Singing together carries us out of our isolation, our self-centeredness, our ego (once I stop worrying about whether my voice is tolerable or I'm singing the right notes!) and into a different dimension. Community singing inevitably joins us to others in a safe, shared experience. Sometimes when we are singing, I think, “Look what we can create together. What else can we do?” That in and of itself, I think, nurtures healing.

Prayer, Laying On of Hands, and Anointing

As the primary animator and creator of this service, I was most interested in the responses for this portion of the service that invites all participants to experience individual prayer, laying on of hands and anointing. I enjoyed working with the team of pastors and pastoral workers to find, adapt, and prepare ritual texts and actions that allowed for some ritual spontaneity. Roman Catholics are perhaps more familiar with a formal sacrament of the sick that includes the laying on of hands and anointing. I was particularly interested in responses that compared both ritual experiences.

One Catholic respondent, a choir member, and nurse practitioner had this to say.

Concerning the ritual anointing at the HPHS services, I have never missed this part. It's different from the anointing of the sick within my Roman Catholic tradition. In the HPHS services, I feel free to present my burdens, and bring also those of others, to the minister. Each Prayer team minister heard, and rephrased my presented need for healing, in the words of the anointing. The sensation of my head 'held' in their hands and the warmth of the oil on my forehead, makes the anointing real and symbolizes and makes present grace for my journey.

Another comment came from one of the HPHS instrumentalists.

As a cradle Catholic, my only prior experience of anointing has been from a priest. It has been both freeing and moving to receive laying on of hands and anointing from women and people of other faith traditions.

The next comment is from a Prayer Team member who consistently ministered at the “anointing” stations for most services. She speaks of different levels of participation and embodiment. She notes reciprocity in the various ritual actions offered and celebrated in the service.

I participated in all but one service and served as a prayer team minister at five out of the remaining seven. I felt a sense of anticipation at these services; that although there were different levels of participation, everyone came with purpose to them. The variety was from observer to receiver of an anointing. People coming to be anointed seemed to have a hunger, I'm not sure individually for what, yet is seemed fulfilled and relieved after they left the station. There were heavy burdens shared often for another and then for

themselves. I did not feel they came for answers or solutions but were looking for comfort, perhaps a lightening of their load even for a brief time. The participants embody both sufferings and courage. I am humbled to be God's mediator.

Another pastor on the Prayer Team spoke of many coming to him seeking healing and renewed strength in relationship and family systems.

At each service (I ministered at 5 of the 7) I was struck with the honesty of what was shared regarding experiences of alienation or conflict within family systems. For me as a member of the team of ecumenical ministers, it was humbling to be entrusted with confidential and personal information by many of those who came forward for laying on of hands and anointing. The prayers provided were highly appropriate.

One HPHS instrumentalist expressed his emotions as he approached a healing station.

I was moved to tears as I approached a female pastor. It was a new experience for me. I don't have those in my church tradition! Her invitation to prayer and my simple utterances in tears were met with a warm, loving, prayerful flow of words and gesture. I wish she would be leading my church!

On Ecumenical Healing Prayer, Singing, and Unity

Questions six and seven of the feedback questionnaire sought to make connections between ecumenism, healing, and singing. A number of respondents simply chose to reflect upon ecumenism and what that meant to them. Ultimately for me, did the service provide for both? Did participants connect healing with unity and ecumenism? Is the Healing Prayer, Healing Song service a performance of both healing and unity? For this section, six responses are included.

One Prayer Team member reflected upon ecumenism. For her, living ecumenism is an active stance in her life. She actively embraces unity as a spiritual practice, choosing to remain a Methodist but also finding a home in a local parish community.

Of course, ecumenism is very meaningful to me. I am a Methodist who belongs to a Roman Catholic Parish! Christians are all disciples of Christ. We have different traditions, different understandings of Scripture, but at the core, we are the same family.

She continues.

Sometimes we categorize people of other denominations by differences and do not recognize all that we share. “Othering” is often destructive. Uniting is powerful and healing. We need to pray for open hearts, softened hearts—open to God and to all those we encounter.

Another Prayer Team member connects the monthly “Taizé” service to the new HPHS service and speaks of a deepening of engagement on the part of participants.

These services that built upon the Taizé model of ecumenical prayer actually deepened the engagement of participants by asking us to bring our prayers for healing and wholeness into the shared space for worship. The sharing of personal information that occurred at the prayer stations also deepened a sense of unity and community.

Another musician speaks of the quality of ecumenical prayer and makes connections to the need for personal and communal healing.

Ecumenical prayer is a powerful unifying tool, giving people from different Christian traditions a means to pray together for common needs. Our dreams, pains, heartaches, and joys are often similar, but our faith traditions can be divisive. HPHS provides a way to worship with friends and family from other faith traditions and feel connected in our brokenness yet buoyed up in our hopefulness. Moving into 2024, our country’s political turmoil is becoming a healing we need to be praying for.

One choir member spoke of the need for both healing and ecumenical prayer and the need for the gift of “diversity” to be brought and placed before our altar.

The ecumenical setting and context for this prayer only emphasizes our common needs as humans and as believers in a greater Mystery. Now is time for such unity and this prayer helps bring diversity to our altar. Such prayer for unity in diversity is needed in our fractionated world.

As we sing, “Let us bring the gifts that differ, and, in splendid, varied ways, sing a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Delores Dufner, OSB, “Sing a New Church” (St. Joseph: MN, Sisters of Saint Benedict, OCP, 1991).

Another respondent speaks of both closeness and spiritual intimacy within the service.

I couldn't have named it before, but I feel a connection (between "singing" and "unity") more concretely in these services over the past few months. I feel closer to people in the worship space in a spiritual way even if I don't get a chance to meet them at the hospitality time afterward. I hug people I know and strangers (I don't know) and feel a spiritual intimacy of sorts. It is very difficult to describe.

Another Prayer Team member recognizes the connection of healing, unity, and song pointing to our future life into the eternal heart of God.

Simply coming together and singing and praying together is a visible sign of unity. Also, adding the intention for healing and wholeness makes it stronger and active. These prayer opportunities feed people, but also give a vision for what we need to do to create "heaven on earth."

Affirmations, Critiques, Suggestions

Finally, I asked for constructive feedback, critique, and any affirmations for the service that respondents wanted to share.

One Prayer team member is preparing for ordination in the Lutheran (ELCA) Church.

I want to affirm that you are acknowledging the need for both corporate and individual healing.

I want to affirm that you are calling out homophobia as problematic in a Roman Catholic space.

I want to affirm that the worship itself is carefully crafted to be visual (icons, other art), auditory (speaking, singing, silence), and experiential (oil, laying on of hands, candle procession).

I want to affirm that you have given people the option to pray both communally and individually.

I want to affirm that the services are ecumenical.

While there is no preaching at the HPHS service, there were three services where a brief reflection that focused on the scripture was included in the worship aid. (The reflection was read by one of the lectors.) I agree with the respondent below, that it is not needed.

I am not sure—personally—about the longer texts—that feel close to sermon(ettes).

Several respondents commented on the need to help get more people to the service.

I think HPHS has been absolutely wonderful. I would like to think about how to bring more folks in. Flyers around the village? More word-of-mouth efforts? I think once someone experiences the service, they likely will come back. It has been a great new project to be a part of.

Others asked about the possibility of broadening the ecumenical (interfaith) scope of the service to truly welcome more people.

Though I know it's an ecumenical Christian service, I'm wondering if it could be possible to include/acknowledge more intentionally non-Christian faith traditions.

Several respondents mentioned the altar area and the reflective art. One spoke of this area as being “alive.”

Keep up the richness of the reflective images and environment around the altar as it is truly a spiritually “alive” part of the service.

Diversity of both prayer team, ministers and assembly has been an on-going goal for the service. We are just beginning to see more glimmers of diversity in all three areas.

Although the music ministers for Healing Prayer, Healing Song are almost all from the same racial background, other elements of the prayer, i.e. planners, readings / readers, artwork, prayer texts, etc. reflect diversity and the unity that can come through our common prayer.

Another participant spoke of the inclusiveness of the prayer.

I LOVED the ecumenical/interfaith aspect of this ritual prayer, and the different ministers who anointed. I'm so used to women ministers, but I think for some people, this was new for them in such a wonderful way. I find the sharing of the light and candle procession ritual so inclusive and perfect for the prayer.

The overall feedback is positive from all who responded to the interview request. I have also received positive feedback from parishioners and others from beyond the parish who have

participated regularly in the service. Most respondents are finding a connection with healing and musicking to celebrate or restore unity. No respondents used the term “performance” when considering either common song or prayer together in an ecumenical context.

Regarding several comments about making the service more inclusive and welcoming for those who are not Christian, there is a tension or balance when preparing a service that is ecumenical and not necessarily inter-faith in its overall scope and intended outreach. Over the years, the monthly prayer “In the spirit of Taizé” has from time to time had attendees from traditions other than Christian who find some resonance with the service. I am currently aware of two individuals who are in this situation who have participated in the HPHS services. One of the HPHS team members also expressed concern about the use of baptismal language in some of the prepared prayers that seemingly assumed all present were baptized. This was a helpful and sensitive insight.

The reflective prayer space around the main altar continues to be a very positive work in progress. Many have commented on the prayer space and the reflective art as an aid to prayer and reflection. One respondent referred to the space as “active and alive.” Several respondents commented on the healing stations and the power of human touch and the beauty of “being heard.” Several Roman Catholic respondents were quite moved by the possibility and experience of being ministered to by a female lay minister or ordained pastor. For me, as the animator of this prayer and outreach, I am keenly aware of the beauty and paradox of this new ecumenical prayer and ritual taking place around an altar that sadly, many find themselves not welcome. The altar is a physical reminder to me that there is much more to be done for the sake of unity.

From the beginning, we have strived not to cause confusion for any participant between the official Roman Catholic Sacrament of the Sick and the ritual and anointing offered at each

HPHS service. The worship aid for each service includes the following clarification: “This anointing is a sign of comfort and restoration that accompanies our prayers for healing and wholeness. Although similar in some ways, it is not the sacrament of the sick celebrated in the Catholic Church.” One choir member took part in the healing ritual several times and offered this perspective:

I tried it twice and it felt... awkward, particularly since it wasn't in a sacramental context where I would feel more at home. For me something this ritualized needs to be reserved within the structure of the Catholic Church; it felt to me like the ministers were “playing Catholic.” I wonder whether I would feel differently had the services been held outside of a Catholic church building.

Another consideration for the future of HPHS is the ongoing expectation for the healing choir. As stated earlier, the choir is drawn from the larger choir of Ascension. This choir currently has fifty-plus members. Several singers from other choirs in the parish also participate by invitation. The bulk of the learning takes place at the larger choir rehearsal setting. Those invited from other choirs must have good sight-reading skills. The hope for the on-going growth of the healing choir is to have enough of a critical mass of singers who are willing and able to join in the HSHP services in the future.

Another question for consideration is: How many services in the course of a year constitute what might be considered a “regularly scheduled” service? We are currently singing six services, three in the fall and three in the spring. Offering the prayer for a series of consecutive months allows for a sense of regularity, familiarity and provides a stronger possibility for “growing” the attendance for the service. I would be hesitant to schedule a quarterly service. In terms of both the Prayer Team and choir, some choir members are feeling that the commitment is perhaps too much in addition to weekly choir rehearsals and Sunday Eucharist. As we plan for the continuation of the prayer, would four total services (two in the fall

and two in the spring) be enough to create on-going expectation and growth for such a service?

The live streaming of services continues to be valued within the parish as an added level of pastoral care and outreach, especially for the sick and homebound. Ascension Church live streams at least one Sunday Mass each week. We are also committed to live streaming the monthly “Taizé” prayer and the HPHS services. The on-line communities for both services continue to grow. One goal for the future will be to consider more seriously the needs and possibilities for the on-line community.

Finally, it is a continuing hope for this service that it can become more ethnically, racially, and socially diverse. While this is slowly beginning to happen, much more relational work within the local community and beyond needs to be done.

CONCLUSION

“Unity in the body of Christ offers the world the most convincing proof that the gospel we share is indeed worthy of embrace.”¹

As I initially set out to consider the ongoing ecumenical call to unity in the Body of Christ, and the performance of ecumenism within the context of ecumenical prayer, I have become increasingly mindful of my vocation as a pastoral musician. My primary role has always been to help bring people together for times of prayer and song within the typical liturgical context of the Roman Catholic Church. At times, within one’s vocation, there can be an experience of a call within a call. For me, the ecumenical call has been an ongoing attraction with the potential and power of ecumenical prayer and the call to unity.

Throughout the years, I have been fortunate in my pastoral setting to have the freedom and creative space to prepare and animate other patterns of prayer (not formally liturgical) for the performance and celebration of unity. Throughout this journey, numerous scholarly voices along the way have continued to enliven the call within me: prophetic voices, practical voices, inclusive voices, challenging voices, unifying voices, affirming voices, and voices that sing and pray! Many of these voices speak from documents written decades ago offering potential and

¹ Gary B. Agee, *That We May Be One: Practicing Unity in a Divided Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing and Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022), 137.

possibility for those who will attentively listen today. Some voices speak within and for communities committed to the broad and inclusive vision of an ecumenical vocation.

The *prophetic* voice of Pope John Paul II recorded in *Ut Unum Sint* is strong and forceful as it speaks of God's will for unity. It is a voice that challenges all Christians to become and make present a living communion committed to the strengthening and healing of relationships demanded by the ministry of reconciliation.

The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God. For this reason, he sent his Son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love. On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion. This is the basis not only of the duty, but also of the responsibility before God and his plan, which falls to those who through Baptism become members of the Body of Christ, a Body in which the fullness of reconciliation and communion must be made present.²

The *practical* voice sounding from the text of *Unitatis redintegratio* continues to call Christians to grow in deeper holiness of life and gather for times of ecumenical prayer. The practical voice of *Unitatis redintegratio* invites individual and communal effort and commitment to prayer through an intensification of spiritual practices.

All the faithful should remember that the more effort they make to live holier lives according to the Gospel, the better will they further Christian unity and put it into practice. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly [and sisterly] love. This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, "spiritual ecumenism."³

² John Paul II, "Ut Unum Sint" (On Commitment to Ecumenism), 1995, par. 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.pdf (accessed February 20, 2021).

³ Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 7–8.

The *inclusive voice* of theologian Carolyn Chau calls us to a deep unity and solidarity with the world and all its peoples. “Oneness is necessary to promote the reign of God; that is, if the reign of God is about the power of love to heal the world, and love is unity, the triumph of love can never be attained or attested to by a divided body.”⁴ Chau eloquently connects salvation with healing, seeing the two as one reality.

It has been a part of the church’s self-understanding from the beginning that it is a unique instrument of healing and newness of life. *Salus*, the Latin term for “salvation,” means, at its core, healing. The earliest Christians were moved to become followers of Christ because, in part, they witnessed the miraculous restoration of health and life performed by Jesus’s closest friends, who viewed him as their teacher. . . . The kind of healing that salvation signifies is, however, more global and profound than physical restoration alone. The depiction of the church as “the New Israel” in the Gospel of Luke indicates the way in which the church sees itself playing a critical role in healing the history of the world, or what is called salvation history: God, through Christ and the church, brings about justice, redemption, and liberation from the oppression and brokenness of the world, which the Israelites experienced in an especially poignant way.⁵

Indeed, our ultimate source of healing comes from a loving God. This God of love and healing acts through us to bring about justice and the elimination of all that causes disunity—all that divides and destroys relationships. Chau reminds us that enacting unity is all about embracing the mission of God. This saving mission entails working for unity and the restoration of brokenness in a world always in need of healing.

A voice of *challenge* sounded from Patrick, a longtime and highly respected parishioner in my local community. Throughout the years of offering a monthly prayer in the spirit of Taizé, I often remember a challenging question from Patrick. He recently passed (at age ninety-three) into eternal life, having led the parish peace and justice commission for over forty years. Even in death, his voice stays with me. As an attorney and former Jesuit priest, he spent his whole career

⁴ Carolyn Chau, “The Church: Mission-Led Ecclesiology for Today,” 233.

⁵ Carolyn Chau, “The Church: Mission-Led Ecclesiology for Today,” 230–231.

advocating for the poor and marginalized and fighting for racial justice. Patrick was always appreciative of the monthly prayer and the many folks who gathered every first Friday night.

Patrick often asked me questions about the monthly prayer. On more than one occasion he asked: “So, why do you think all these people, especially all these young people, come to this service?” I would always offer some obvious (to me) responses. “Perhaps, they are drawn to the common song or to the silence and the more meditative and contemplative aspects of the prayer.” “Some might be drawn to the inclusive intercessions that pray for the healing of all that is broken and in need of unity and healing.” “Others might like a service with no preaching!” “Perhaps others are more attracted to the ecumenical aspect of the prayer and its focus on reconciliation and unity.” I would always conclude: “Patrick, why do you think all these people come each month?” On one occasion he replied: “I think they come because they have a need to gather together as one.” He paused and then added: “And then, see what might happen!”

Patrick was a man of deep prayer, and his prayer was deeply intertwined with his sense of mission in the world. He wanted the monthly prayer to be more than a beautiful prayer service. He saw both beauty and promise in the service. Each month, hundreds of people intentionally coming together as one, singing together, engaging in silence and prayer together, bringing all our prayers to God for unity, reconciliation, and peace, and then sent forth in mission. In very simple ways the monthly prayer has always tried and continues to do that drawing on the spirit and witness of the Taizé Community.

A *unifying* voice of healing and communion is Brother Alois of Taizé, the former prior of the Taizé Community. The role of the prior in the Taizé community is to act as a servant of communion. He, together with Chau links unity with healing. Brother Alois speaks of an integrated and inclusive unity for all of creation.

Redemption contains the gift of unity: the unity of [humankind] with God, inner unity as the healing of each person, the unity of the whole human family and of all creation. We cannot receive unity with God without receiving unity among all people. The church's reason for existing is to be the visible sign, the sacrament of this.⁶

Of particular interest for me was Brother Alois' idea of the redemptive gift of "inner unity" expressed in the healing of every person. Both the words of Brother Alois with the voice of Carolyn Chau inspired me to consider creating a common prayer that would perform ecumenism within the context of a service of healing.

In this past year I have come to realize that ecumenical work truly is healing work. Ecumenism and the prayer that is enacted for the discovery or restoration of unity entails the effort to seek community through the cultivation and healing of relationships. These relationships are potentially forged through common song joined with ritual actions and gestures accessible and welcome to all.

I discovered an *affirming* voice through the scholarship and teaching of Marcell Silva Steuernagel in his integrated study of church music. His hybrid approach for church music that integrates performance studies, ritual studies, ethnomusicology, and theology provided a model for my exploration of performing ecumenism in the context of ecumenical prayer. Steuernagel challenged and affirmed my expectations as I applied some of his insights about church music as performance to the idea of performing ecumenism in the context of an embodied and sung "liturgical" service of healing and unity. One goal for each HPHS service is to foster a deeper experience of unity and deeper transformation through the performance of prayer, enacted ritual and song for all who gather. Much of the work of ecumenism and prayer in common is the

⁶ Brother Alois of Taizé. "Make the Unity of Christ's Body Your Passionate Concern: The Path of Communion Followed at Taizé" (Taizé: France, Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2012), 6.

cultivation and healing of relationships. One comment from Steuernagel provides resonance for such an ecumenical service: “Viewed through the lens of performance, these transformational expectations serve as a looking glass through which questions of identity, boundaries, individuality, tradition, and community align, as the congregation waits for the transformation that is expected to occur during the liturgy.”⁷

Singing and praying voices performing together as one, and for others was most clearly realized and “heard” in chapters three and four as I considered the monthly prayer “In the Spirit of Taizé” and the newer prayer initiative, *Healing Prayer, Healing Song*. Both services were examined within the context of my pastoral setting and considered as performances of ecumenism through the lens of performance studies. The monthly “Taizé” styled service was examined through Silva Steuernagel’s modes of participation in church music providing five possible ways to concretely perform ecumenism within the context of a service dedicated to unity. Both services, through the singing and praying voices that participate, witness to unity and the mission of the Gospel.

Each of these voices continue to both sing and speak to me of the ongoing ecumenical call. Each of these voices continue to shape and inspire my work and ministry as a pastoral musician in significant ways. This intense year of study and increased pastoral ecumenical musicking has provided both learnings, surprises and reminders of the ecumenical and musical work that needs to be continually rehearsed and performed.

One significant learning for me was the realization of the importance of both the connection and integration between a regularly scheduled prayer service and its connection to

⁷ Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance*, 60.

life beyond the borders of the prayer space. A monthly prayer like “Taizé” Oak Park offers a more limited opportunity for the integrating pillars of spiritual ecumenism mentioned earlier.⁸ This is perhaps more easily realized during a week spent in Taizé engaging in daily prayer, song, and community life. While a monthly prayer experience can practically offer only so much, it still can be a significant part of one’s ongoing spiritual practice. For the Oak Park prayer, the challenge for the future might be to find additional ways to extend the spirit of the monthly prayer beyond the service, finding ways to provide time for hospitality and getting to know others who participate.

A significant learning from the implementation of the *Healing Prayer, Healing Song*, has been the realization of the vulnerability required on the part of participants to approach a healing minister for prayer, laying on of hands, and anointing. To admit the need for healing of any kind requires an honesty that challenges our overly private and self-reliant culture. It is my hope that the ritual actions offered in this prayer can allow for a variety of individual levels of participation and engagement.

Another significant and practical learning for me was to realize the time it takes to both design, coordinate, and prepare for each service in a typical month as a full-time church musician in an active parish that additionally offers a variety of other prayer and formational outreaches. The HPHS service is more labor intensive than our usual “Taizé” monthly service as it includes meeting with the prayer team and ensuring the presence of at least six healing ministers who will assist at the service.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “The Bishop and Christian Unity: an ecumenical vademecum” 2020 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/04/201205a.html> (accessed September 8, 2023), par. 15.

Preparation for the HPHS also involves preparing and rehearsing the healing choir and additional instrumentalists. Additionally, for several services, small groups of choristers and youth cantors from the parish children's choir were prepared to sing and lead music at the service. There are also several persons who serve as lectors and prayer leaders for the various spoken parts of the service. It's quite a team effort. Additionally, preparing and setting up the worship space (reflective gallery, etc.) is also a complicated job with several volunteers who have begun to assist. The additional work and team effort needed for this service challenges me to practically consider offering the service only four to six times each year. One unforeseen byproduct of the required team effort and work required for this service was the blessing and cultivation of friendships with members of the ecumenical team and other ministers.

One other practical learning is the time it takes to build or "grow" a service that will include people of all races and traditions. While I see glimmers of a more diverse assembly, the service remains primarily one attended mostly by people who identify as white. In terms of attendance for HPHS, I need to remember that the monthly "In the Spirit of Taizé" first Friday evening prayer has been gathering for over thirty years. It took at least two to three years to establish an average monthly attendance of one hundred people. Patience is essential when beginning a new worship outreach or offering. The virtue of humility is also needed as we remember that it is not always about numbers. Throughout the past year of offering eight different HPHS services, the monthly attendance (including the choir) has hovered just over one hundred participants. The Protestant pastors and colleagues on the prayer team are very positive about the current attendance while some of the choir members and other Ascension-based liturgical and pastoral ministers are hoping for larger numbers, especially in the participant ratio of choir to assembly.

On a personal level as both Christian and pastoral musician, my passion for Christian unity and the ecumenical vocation has grown exponentially in the last several years throughout this course of this study. As both a Roman Catholic and a pastoral musician, I am inspired to embrace this call of unity through ongoing times of prayer. The ecumenical *vademecum* offers words of challenge to all Roman Catholics. It states, “Because we share a real communion as brothers and sisters in Christ, Catholics not only can, but indeed must, seek out opportunities to pray with other Christians. Certain forms of prayer are particularly appropriate in the search for Christian unity.”⁹

This thesis has examined two forms or patterns of prayer. Through the lens of performance studies, both services attempt to perform unity primary through common song and embodied ritual actions. Both attempt to celebrate and pray for reconciliation, healing, and wholeness. Both join prayer and song with God’s mission on earth. We are all called to do this ecumenical work according to our varied gifts and capacities, some more intentionally. Brother Alois of Taizé reminds us:

Our time needs courageous women and men who express the Gospel call to reconciliation by their whole lives. There do not necessarily have to be many of these men and women. Does not the gospel compare the Kingdom of God to a little yeast that leavens all the dough?¹⁰

I believe that many pastoral musicians are gifted with an ecumenical heart and are prime candidates to express the call to unity “with their whole lives.” Pastoral musicians often live into their vocations out of a deeply felt ecumenical call that realizes the call for all of God’s people to

⁹ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “The Bishop and Christian Unity: an ecumenical vademecum” 2020 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/04/201205a.html> (accessed September 8, 2023), par. 17.

¹⁰ Brother Alois of Taizé. “Make the Unity of Christ’s Body Your Passionate Concern,” 7.

sing as one to our God, a God who cannot be confined to a particular denomination or tradition.¹¹ Pastoral musicians tend to be curious disciples always looking for the best music to be gleaned from other traditions. Common song, seeded with the songs, texts and melodies, from other traditions and churches, open God's people to the God of many names. This ecumenical spirit can prepare one to move towards another, to be comfortable with the unfamiliar, and to be respectful of the other. This helps pastoral musicians and all ministers to lead at different levels of intensity and teaches them to be more nuanced and subtle. Paul Westermeyer affirms that an ecumenical heart sustained and conscious of the breath of the spirit deep within a gathered assembly allows pastoral musicians to know and feel when the right time is to get out of the way and let God's people sing with one breath, pulse, and pace. "By the craft of their musical vocation, pastoral musicians are at the center of a people's heartbeat."¹²

Discernment, questioning, and dialogue are always requirements as we move along the ways of ecumenical striving, understanding, and common prayer together. As Christians strive for deeper unity and oneness, we can unite our sometimes feeble attempts at ecumenical worship with the ultimate goal of making God's mission and reign more visible.

As I consider the movement towards unity and communion in God as experienced and performed in both "In the Spirit of Taizé" and the HPHS services at Ascension, the words of Dominique DuBois Gilliard offer hope and inspiration. Gilliard is an ordained pastor working for racial righteousness and reconciliation. He speaks of the healing heart of God, a heart that continually moves people towards wholeness. "God's justice moves toward restoration,

¹¹ Paul Westermeyer, *Church Musicians: Reflections on their Call, Craft, History and Challenges* (Saint Louis, MO: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2015), 37.

¹² Paul Westermeyer, *Church Musicians*, 38.

reintegration, and redemption. God’s justice is inherently connected to healing the harmed, restoring what has been lost, and reconciling those who are estranged from God and community. God’s heart and justice are inherently restorative.”¹³



¹³ Dominique DuBois Gilliard, *Rethinking Incarceration: Advocating for Justice That Restores* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 177, 178–179.

APPENDIX A: ECUMENICAL SONGS OF HEALING, UNITY, AND INCLUSION

Recognizing and embracing a common heritage and repertoire of hymns is a great gift of the ecumenical movement. Expanding our repertoire and singing new ecumenical texts and tunes that tell of communion in the Body of Christ, inclusion, and unity, strengthens bonds that move across and beyond the boundaries of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions. Some texts additionally sing of the call to justice and the healing of divisions and brokenness. Pastoral musicians have a special opportunity to continually seek out and curate repertoire that sings and prays for Christian unity.

What follows is a list of both familiar and newer texts and tunes that can be used in both Sunday worship and special times of ecumenical prayer. Several hymnals are listed as an aid to discovering the sampling of items included in this appendix. Additionally, common tunes, themes, and scriptural references are included if available. Most titles include a link for the hymn available on YouTube or from a music publisher. I also include the refrain (if part of the text) or portion(s) of the stanzas.

Hymnals cited:

Gather, Fourth Edition, © 2021 GIA Publications, Inc. (G4)

Worship, Fourth Edition, © 2021 GIA Publications, Inc. (W4)

Glory to God, The Presbyterian Hymnal, © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press (GTG)

Voices Together, © 2020 MennoMedia (VT)

Christ Has Broken Down the Wall

Text and Tune: Mark Miller, b. 1967 © 2011 Choristers Guild

Scripture: see Ephesians 2:14

Themes: Acceptance, Boundary-crossing, Inclusion, Reconciliation, Unity

Text sample: stanzas one, two, and four

1. Christ has broken down the wall.

Christ has broken down the wall.

Let us join our hearts as one.

Christ has broken down the wall.

2. We're accepted as we are.

We're accepted as we are.

Through God's love, all is reconciled.

We're accepted as we are.

4. We will tear down the walls!

We will tear down every wall!

God has called us, one and all.

Christ has broken down the wall.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EBAWB4snXo> (Chorister's Guild)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Itto31a0IWg> (Adult Choir, piano, trumpet, bass, drums)

Christ, Our Peace

Text and Tune: Marty Haugen, b. 1950 © 2007 GIA Publications, Inc.

Themes: Body of Christ, Diversity, Eucharist, Inclusion, Peace, Reconciliation, Unity, Welcome

Text refrain:

Christ, our peace, you break down the walls that divide us;

Christ, our peace, come, make us one body in you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kes9CslvCV8> (Studio recording, GIA Publications, Inc.)

The Church's One Foundation

Text: Samuel J. Stone, 1839–1900, alt.

Tune: AURELIA (Samuel S. Wesley, 1810–1876)

Themes: Baptism, Church, Communion, New Creation, Union

Hymnal(s): G4 #816, VT #397(*altered text*), GTG #321

Text sample: stanza two

*Elect from every nation,
yet one or all the earth,
her charter of salvation:
one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with every grace endued.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LZVz1guz2c> (Organ, Mass choir, Chennai, India)

Come Now, O Prince of Peace

Text: *O-so-sô*, Geonyong Lee, b. 1947; para. by Marion Pope, alt., © 1990 Marion Pope

Tune: OSOSO, 11 11; Geonyong Lee, b. 1947, © 1990, Geonyong Lee

Themes: Advent, Reconciliation, Unity

Hymnal(s): G4 #908, GTG #103 (*See simpler text alteration in GTG.*)

Text sample: stanzas one and four

*1. Come now, O Prince of Peace, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people.*

*2. Come, Hope of unity, make us one body,
come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all nations.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPF9nDMt8UM>

(Choral setting, arr. Jeremy Bankson, organ, flute, windchimes)

Creator of the Intertwined

Text: Jacque B. Jones, b. 1950 © 2004, 2001 GIA Publications, Inc., and National Association of
Congregational Christian Churches

Tune: KINGSFOLD, English melody; harmonized by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872–1958

Themes, Healing, Interfaith awareness, Peace, Unity

Hymnal: W4 #821

Text sample: stanzas one and two

*1. Creator of the intertwined, you made us all unique:
each one with ears to hear faith's call, each one with voice to speak.
Each worships where the call is heard: in forest, temple, dome,
on mountain top, in upper room; each one must find a home.*

*2. The song of peace is sung by all; strength grows from unity.
In harmony we celebrate your gift: diversity.
Can we not sing each other's songs, speak unfamiliar prayer,
rejoicing in the riches found in differences we share?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp3KHxzAwCU> (SATB a cappella)

Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race

Text: Ruth Duck, b. 1947 © 1992 GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: TALLIS' CANON, Thomas Tallis, c. 1505–1585

Themes: Connection, Diversity, Eucharist, Peace

Hymnal(s): W4 #842, G4 #909

Text sample: stanza one

*Diverse in culture, nation, race,
we come together by your grace.
God, let us be a meeting ground
where hope and healing love are found.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4y-y1LIPuw> (Organ, congregation)

For the Healing of the Nations

Text: Fred Kaan, 1929–2009 © 1965 Hope Publishing Company

Tunes: This text has been set and sung to a variety of hymn tunes, including:

ST. THOMAS, John Wade, 1711–1786

WESTMINSTER ABBEY, adapted from an anthem of Henry Purcell, 1659–1695, by Ernest Hawkins, 1807–1868

REGENT SQUARE, Henry T. Smart, 1813–1879

Scripture: based on Revelation 21:1–27; 22:1–5

Themes: Healing, Freedom from Hatred, Journey, Peace

Hymnals: G4 #884, VT #705, W4 #798

Text: stanzas one and four

*1. For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action,
help us rise and pledge our word.*

*2. You, creator God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind,
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXtfIE6jSYQ>

WESTMINSTER ABBEY (Organ, congregation)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPt30JqefLo> ST. THOMAS (Wade) (Guitar, soloist)

From the Many, Make Us One

Text: Gabe Huck, b. 1941, © 2015 GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: Tony E. Alonso, b. 1980, © 2015 GIA Publications, Inc.

Themes: Eucharist, Footwashing, Christian journey, Justice

Hymnals: G4 #1029

Text: refrain

*When we sing and when we cry,
as we live and as we die:
To this table now we come.
From the many, make us one.*

<https://giamusic.com/resource/from-the-many-make-us-one-print-g8898>

From This Bright Hour (Let Every Voice with Every Breath)

Text: Mark A. Miller, b. 1967; © 2017

Tune: WOOLSEY HALL, LM with refrain,

Themes: Gathering, Praise, Unity

Source: *Revolution of the Heart: Songs by Mark A. Miller*

© 2022, GIA Publications, Inc.

Text: refrain

*All are welcome, all invited to open hearts and open minds!
In our living, in our learning may we always be searching for truth and light!*

Gather at the River

Text: Lindy Thompson, b. 1967; © 2015

Music: Mark A. Miller, b. 1967; © 2015

Scripture: Psalm 46:4; Isaiah 43:18–21; 1 John 4:16–21; Revelation 22:1–2

Themes: Baptism, Communion, Gathering, Inclusiveness, Justice, Reconciliation

Source: *Revolution of the Heart: Songs by Mark A. Miller* © 2022, GIA Publications, Inc.

Text: refrain

*When in faith, with grateful hearts,
we open wide the doors,
love and healing will abound,
now and ever more!*

God Welcomes All

Text: John Bell, b. 1949 © 2008, Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community (admin. GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: THEMBA AMEN, South African Song transcribed by John Bell

Themes: Gathering, Inclusion

Hymnal(s): GTG #399

Text: short song

*God welcomes all, strangers and friends;
God's love is strong and it never ends.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VLbV52-xyo> (“COVID” recording, one performer)

Healing River of the Spirit

Text: Ruth Duck, b. 1947 ©1996 The Pilgrim Press

Tune: BEACH SPRING, The Sacred Harp

Themes: Community, Healing, Christian journey, Peace,

Hymnal(s): G3 #665, G4 #719, VT #642 (Tune: Sally Ann Morris)

Text sample: stanza three

*Living stream that heals the nations,
make us channels of your power.
All the world is torn by conflict;
wars are raging at this hour.
Saving Spirit, move among us,
guide our winding human course,
till we find our way together,
flowing homeward to our Source.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XSxxAyRoqs> (Piano, Paulist seminarians)

Help Us Accept Each Other

Text: Romans 15:7; Fred Kaan, 1929–2009, © 1975 Hope Publishing Company

Tune: AURELIA, Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1810–1876

(Alternate tune: ELLACOMBE)

Themes: Communion, Faith, Forgiveness, Healing, Holy Spirit, Inclusiveness, Justice, Unity

Hymnal: W4 #818

Text sample: stanzas one and four

*1. Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
Teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us, and to bring us to believe
We are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.*

*4. Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance, for justice, and for bread,
we need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on:
renew us with your spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lRaEpr4Syac> (Tune: AURELIA) (Organ, piano, choir)

How Good and Pleasant, Lord, It Is

Text: Herman Stuempfle, Jr., 1923–2007 © 2006, GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: DOVE OF PEACE, American melody; harmonized by Charles H. Webb,

b. 1933, © 1989, The United Methodist Publishing House

Themes: Church, Healing, Peace, Pilgrimage, Unity

Hymnal(s): W4 #819

Text sample: stanzas one and four

*1. How good and pleasant, Lord, it is to live in unity
with sisters, brothers knit in bonds of peace and charity,
of peace and charity.*

*4. With hearts forgiven, love renewed, and unity restored,
Lord, make us instruments of peace within this warring world,
within this warring world.*

In a Time of Pain

Text: Francis Patrick O'Brien, b. 1958 © 2002 GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN, arr. Francis Patrick O'Brien

Themes: Healing, Justice, Reconciliation, Wholeness

Hymnal(s): G4 #1057

Text sample: stanzas three and four

*3. When the weakest ones have no place to run from the terror that haunts their days,
who will give them peace, make their nightmares cease? Who will drive their dark away?
Come save us as you saved your Son, who embraced each child in pain.
May your healing balm bring us peace and calm that will make us whole again.*

*4. Teach us what is just and in whom to trust; by your wisdom we will abide.
May the ones with power, in this crucial hour, seek the Spirit as their guide.
Come save us as you saved your Son from corruption's deadly toll.
May we rise at last from our shadowed past with your love as our guide and goal.*

<https://giamusic.com/resource/in-a-time-of-pain-print-g5892>

In Christ There Is No East or West

Text: Galations 3:23; John Oxenham, 1908, alt.

Tune: MCKEE, African American Spiritual; adapt. Harry T. Burleigh, 1866–1949

Themes: Communion, Inclusion, Unity

Hymnals: G4 #905, GTG #317 and #318,

(Alternate Tune: ST. PETER, Music: Alexander Robert Reinagle)

Text sample: stanzas one and two

*1. In Christ there is no east or west, in him, no south or north,
but one great family bound by love throughout the whole wide earth.*

*2. In Him shall true hearts, everywhere their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord close binding humankind.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEwLle8Ue4Y> (Organ, “COVID” choir)

Jesus, Help Us Live in Peace

Text: Jerry Derstine (JD Martin) © 1977, 2004

Tune: UNITY, Jerry Derstine, © 1977, 2004

Themes: Peace, Unity

Hymnal(s): VT #719

Text: refrain

*Jesus, help us live in peace, from our blindness set us free.
Fill us with your healing love. Help us live in unity.*

<https://www.broadjam.com/songs/jangarrettjdmartin1/jesus-help-us-live-in-peace> (Guitar, vocal)

Lament: My Heart Is Breaking

Text: Mark A. Miller, b. 1967, and Adam M. L. Tice, b. 1979

Tune: FLOYD 10 8 10 6 with refrain, Mark A. Miller, b. 1967; © 2015

Scripture: Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3

Themes: Anger, Lament, Peace, Protest

Source: *Revolution of the Heart: Songs by Mark A. Miller*

© 2022, GIA Publications, Inc.

Text: refrain

*Use our anger to melt the swords of hate.
Use our tears to water thirsty ground.
Give us courage to love all you create.
Come to us and turn the world around,
Come to us and turn your world around.*

Make Us One

Text: Chris de Silva, b. 1967

Tune: ADORO TE DEVOTE; Mode V, *Processionale*, Paris, 1697;
adapted and arranged by Chris de Silva © 2017, GIA Publications, Inc.

Themes: Eucharist, Healing, Service

Hymnal(s): G4 #1034

Text: refrain

*To this meal and sacrifice, Lord, you draw us near:
Taste of God's abundant grace for all gathered here.
In your love you summon us; broken now we come.
By your body and your blood, heal us, make us one.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNITqo91w-o> (Studio recording, GIA Publications, Inc.)

Make Us One

Text and Music: *Jesus Culture*, © 2018

Themes: Unity, Communion in the Trinity

Text:

Verse 1: *One with the Father, one with the Spirit, one with the Son of God.
One with our sister, one with our brother, one family by the blood.*

Chorus: *Make us one, make us one. Your will be done, make us one,
O make us one, make us one. Your will be done, O make us one, O God.*

Verse 2: *One heart with heaven, one mind connected, one body unified.
Bind us together, now and forever, Jesus be glorified. Make us one.*

Bridge: *We confess all our offenses; we confess we've been afraid. We repent of all the pride.
Let all the hurt be washed away. For all the wars and violence against our enemies,
come, heal our land with Your great river, restore the family, make us one.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TemnSACIQeI> (Featuring Chris Quilala, acoustic guitar)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLCdsR3DwbQ&list=PLeoVwUICZyEyiGILQzZI_11A9u1P3vaEc&index=6 (Lyric video)

My Love Colors Outside the Lines

Text: Gordon Light © 1995 Common Cup Company

Music: Gordon Light, arr. Andrew Donaldson

Themes: Healing, Inclusion

Hymnal: VT #582

Text sample: stanza one

*My love colors outside the lines, exploring paths that few could ever find;
and takes me into places where I've never been before,
and opens doors to worlds outside the lines.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zbBz9voqu0> (Piano, soloist)

O For a World

Text: Sr. Miriam Therese Winter, b. 1938; © 1990 Medical Mission Sisters

Tune: AZMON, CM, Carl Gotthelf Gläser, 1781–1829, arr. Lowell Mason, 1792–1872

Themes: Call to action, God's reign, Healing, Justice, Shalom, Welcome

Hymnal(s): GTG #372

Text sample: stanzas two and three

*2. O for a world where goods are shared
and misery relieved,
where truth is spoken, children spared,
equality achieved.*

*3. We welcome one world family
and struggle with each choice
that opens us to unity
and gives our vision voice.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OJanH5zQdw> (James Biery, "COVID" Choir)

One in Your Hands, O God

Text: Adam Tice, b. 1979; © 2019

Tune: OUR WILL, Randall Sensmeier, b. 1948

Scripture: Colossians 1:15–20

Themes: Creation, Unity

Source: *Pulse and Breath: 50 More Hymn Texts*, Adam Tice

© 2019, GIA Publications, Inc.

Text: final phrases from each stanza

Will we hold all things as one?

Will we see all things as one?

Will we know all things as one?

Will we love all things as one

Only You, O God

Text: Susan Briehl, b. 1952

Tune: BALM IN GILEAD, African American Spiritual arr. by Marty Haugen, b. 1950

Text and arrangement © 2003, GIA Publications, Inc.

Themes: Comfort, Healing of the earth, Trust, Woundedness, Wholeness

Hymnal(s): G3 #729

Text: refrain

Only you, O God, and you alone, the broken heart console,

Only you, O God, and you alone, the wounded world make whole.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX80oco0_L8 (Studio recording, GIA Publications, Inc.)

There Is One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

© 1984, 2007 Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent

Text: Ephesians 4, adapted by Robert J. Batastini, b. 1942, and the Taizé Community

Tune: Jacques Berthier, 1923–1994

Scripture: Ephesians 4

Themes: Baptism, One Faith

Hymnal(s): G4 #906

Text: refrain, English and Spanish

*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there is one God who is Father of all.
Hay un Señor, una fe, un bautismo, un solo dios, quien es Padre de todos.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MnfG_zrm_U (SATB a cappella)

We Are Many Parts/Muchos Miembros Hay

Text: 1 Corinthians 12, 13; Marty Haugen, b. 1950; trans. by Santiago Fernández, b. 1971

Tune: Marty Haugen © 1980, 1986, 2005, GIA Publications, Inc.

Themes: Body of Christ, Healing, Love, Unity

Hymnal(s): G4 #910, W4 #822 (W4 English and Spanish)

Text refrain: English and Spanish

*We are many parts, we are all one body, and the gifts we have we are given to share.
May the spirit of love make us one indeed; one, the love that we share,
one, our hope and despair, one, the cross that we bear.*

*Muchos miembros hay, en un solo cuerpo, nuestros dones son para dar y servir.
Que el Espíritu de Dios nos una en su amor; compartiendo el dolor,
Combatiendo el temor, complaciendo al Señor.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vq0011yb6jw>

(“COVID” Choir, Blessed Sacrament, Hollywood, CA)

We Are One in the Spirit (They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love)

Text and Music: Peter Scholtes, b. 1966

Tune: THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS (ST. BRENDAN'S)

Text and Music © 1966 F.E.L. Publications, assigned 1991 to the Lorenz Group

Themes: Human Dignity, Holy Spirit, Justice, Unity, Walking Together

Hymnal(s): G4 #904, GTG #300, VT #387 (English, Spanish, German, and French)

Text: stanza fragments and refrain

*We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord.
We will walk with each other; we will walk hand in hand.
We will work with each other; we will work side by side.
And all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one:*

Refrain:

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89V_WGYQ2gQ (OCP demo choir)

We Are Your People

Text: Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr. 1923–2007, © 1994, WLP, a division of GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: SINE NOMINE, Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872–1958

Themes: Baptism, Healing, Peace, Unity

Hymnal(s): G4 #903

Text: stanza three

*We find in font and cross our unity
yet celebrate our rich diversity.
Binding as one in peace and charity.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

<https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/we-are-your-people-print-008623>

(GIA/WLP arranged by Steven Janco, b. 1961)

We Cannot Measure How You Heal

Text: John L. Bell, b. 1949 and Graham Maule, 1958–2019

Tune: YE BANKS AND BRAES, Scottish traditional; arr. by John L. Bell

© 1989, Iona Community, GIA Publications, Inc., agent

Themes: Healing, Reconciliation, Wholeness

Hymnal(s): G3 #657, G4 #713, GTG #797

Text: stanza three

*So some have come who need your help,
and some have come to make amends,
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here.
To mend the body, mind, and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain,
and to make your broken people whole.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exr0oxZwZKA> (Organ, congregation, UK)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LpIF4JhWuU>

(Choral setting, arr. John Bell, GIA Publications, Inc.)

Your Voice Can Sing

Text: Adam M. Tice, b. 1979; © 2015, GIA Publications, Inc.

Tune: TRIBE, Suzi Byrd, b. 1964; © 2019, GIA Publications, Inc.

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, Matthew 22:1–10, Luke 14: 7–24; 1 Corinthians 10: 16–17;
1 Corinthians 11:17–34, 1 Corinthians 12: 4–31

Themes: Church, Communion, Inclusiveness, Music, Peace, Scripture, Unity, Worship

Source: *Pulse and Breath: 50 More Hymn Texts*, Adam Tice

Another tune (CARMEN DEI) by Randy Sensmeier © 2015, GIA Publications, Inc.

Text sample: stanza four

*With God, our varied parts become one body, joined in praise.
With God, we seek the paths of peace and walk in holy ways.
And as we find new harmony, we join the growing throng,
for Christ is in the midst of us and fills the world with song.*

<https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/your-voice-can-sing-pdf-d1029920>

Your Word, O Christ

Text: Adam M. Tice, b. 1979; © 2019, GIA Publications, Inc.

Music: HOGAN; Chris Ángel, b. 1976; © 2019, GIA Publications, Inc.

Scripture: John 17:20–26; 1 Peter 4:8–11

Themes: Church, Unity

Source: *Pulse and Breath: 50 More Hymn Texts*, Adam Tice

Text: (recurring text within each stanza) *From age to age you make us one.*

<https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/your-word-o-christ-pdf-d987252>

APPENDIX B: HEALING PRAYER, HEALING SONG PRAYER TEAM

Dana Albers serves on the intercessory prayer team at her church, The Practice, in South Barrington, IL.

Sr. Anita Baird is the founding director of the Office for Racial Justice at the Archdiocese of Chicago. A vowed member of the Society of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary, her sisters embrace diversity and foster life and support in a world in travail.

Rev. Dr. Robert Cathey is professor emeritus of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary and a clergy member of Chicago Presbytery.

Allison Dooley is a former nondenominational Evangelical pastor; she was recently received into the Catholic Church. Her previous ministry experience includes pastoral care, hospital chaplaincy, and youth/young adult ministry.

Rev. Jon Freidheim is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

Laura Frost is completing the Master of Divinity at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and is preparing for ordination in the Lutheran Church (ELCA).

Rev. Marylen Marty-Gentile is a spiritual director and clergy person of the United Church of Christ.

Rev. Tim Hoekstra, an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church of North America, has been serving Sub-Urban Life Community Church of the western suburbs for the last thirty-three years.

Anne Murphy, D. Min., has worked in hospitals, and other care settings in her years as a certified chaplain. At Ascension, she is active in various ministries including the Extending the Word group.

Susan Purdie sings with the Ascension music ministry and has promoted healing and social justice throughout her career in social work. She also served as director for the Stephen Ministry in her former church.

Mithun Roy serves as assistant pastor at First Baptist Church of Oak Park. Originally from Kolkata, India, Mithun also spent time as a volunteer in Taizé.

APPENDIX C: HPHS FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe your experience as a choir singer/prayer team member in the *Healing Prayer, Healing Song* services last spring and this fall. How many did you participate in?
2. Was there a piece of choral or assembly (congregational) music that you found particularly appropriate or meaningful?
3. Did any of the reflective images (icons, posters etc.) and other art and environment elements from the prayer space around the altar platform impact you in any way?
4. What are your thoughts on music as a vehicle towards healing? Do you experience or connect choir and community song with healing? If so, how?
5. What was your experience of the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and prayer with one of the ministers of the ecumenical prayer team? (Prayer team members may wish to offer feedback/reflection on their experience as a minister at the prayer/anointing stations.)
6. What are your thoughts about how healing prayer was joined together within the context of an ecumenical Christian service praying for and celebrating unity? From your life of faith, what healing do we need to be praying for?
7. Do you experience or connect choir/community singing with unity (creating, celebrating, or praying for unity)? If so, how?
8. As I prepare for the remainder of services scheduled for late Winter and Spring 2024, can you offer any affirmations, critique, or suggestions for the services that took place in February, March, and April of this year and September, October, and November 2023?

(YouTube links are provided below for reference.)

The HPHS Worship Aid is also available as a link below the recording for reference.

February 2023 Service YouTube link (289 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vr8pytD0p68&t=2401s>

March 2023 Service YouTube link (238 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjqxT89hFtU&t=1049s>

April 2023 Service YouTube link (171 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhAMs1CLgJQ&t=712s>

May 2023 Service YouTube link (189 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91zU5rRgRwo&t=3234s>

September 2023 Service YouTube link (146 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XL2aChHSHk&t=2297s>

October 2023 Service YouTube link (247 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zj6LHQC84yY&t=1709s>

November 2023 Service YouTube link (153 views)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uol-sKYXS54>

*Views as of March 5, 2024.

APPENDIX D: FEEDBACK RESPONSES

HEALING PRAYER, HEALING SONG FEEDBACK RESPONSES: CURATED LIST

What follows are a curated sampling of responses detailing experiences and insights concerning different aspects of the *Healing Prayer, Healing Song* services. The responses within this Appendix are included to honor and simply listen to the voices who found meaning, communion, and restorative potential in the HPHS Services.

Experience and Participation in the Service

HPHS Prayer Team, UCC pastor, Spiritual director

I participated in five of the seven HPHS services. I came to them as a Protestant, an ordained minister, a stranger to the Ascension community, without any experience of working with David other than as a receiver of his Taizé leadership and music. I had no idea what to expect as far as the process or potential for the service. And I came to this bruised by my own church experiences and had some hesitation over stepping into another experience of being visible in a church setting. As a prayer leader, I was also participant and receiver; the experience has been heart-filling and beautiful. (MG)

Ascension Choir Member, Nurse practitioner

I participated in all of them. All of the music, not just the choral selections that the choir sings, express my sentiment and prayer. I am forever grateful to you for so beautifully preparing the service and music around a theme. Learning / singing the songs at rehearsal helps the meaning 'sink' deep into my soul. While it takes effort on my part to eat early and wade through rush hour traffic to drive 17 miles to this service, I am always grateful that I went. It is a balm for my soul. (HS)

Musicking: Assembly Song, Choir, and Instrumentalists

HPHS Prayer Team

Letting the choral pieces—the words and music and voices—wash over me became another avenue of healing. The choral pieces had their own power, different from congregational singing or Taizé chants. (MG)

HPHS Prayer Team, Pastor

Choral music and congregational singing have the capacity to build community among participants even when we come from different communions and congregations. The individual participant is taken out of their isolation and anonymity to become part of a greater whole and unity in the body of Christ. This visceral and “felt” knowledge is powerful and transformative for participants. (RC)

HPHS Instrumentalist, Therapeutic musician

My favorite piece of music was Peace, Salaam, Shalom, sung by the young boy from the Children’s Choir. What a powerful symbol of music bringing together people of various cultures through the healing voice of one young man! Another favorite was “Shelter Your Name” by Danielle Rose. These were especially poignant for me, but truly all of the music was very well chosen, with powerful melodies, compelling lyrics, and sung very well by cantors and choir. (AOS)

Engagement with Reflective Images and Symbols

HPHS Prayer Team, Spiritual director

Art is an avenue into the unconscious, non-rational realm for me, so the art, icons, and dressing of the central space were central elements of the service. My only wonder is whether there’s a critical mass when there’s enough, when there are more than the heart can take in. The challenge is that what kind speaks to me may not speak to someone else. (MG)

Choir member

The icons, images, and art, glowing in the candlelight created by the attendees makes the focus of those in need of healing, besides myself, so real! They “display” the brokenness present in our world, our sacred earth, as the images lay at the foot of the altar. (HS)

HPHS Prayer Team, Presbyterian Elder, Seminary professor

I found the reflective images to be highly appropriate for prayer around the altar and noticed some members of the congregation took photos of them on their cell phones. (RC)

HPHS Prayer Team, Hospital chaplain

Meaningful art-Individual photos of victims of gun/police violence; cumulative number of mass shootings; Palestinian and Jewish boys; flowers in rifles; candles on crossbeam of cross and throughout the art/environment; non-white God images; adding plants (I think to offer hope and compassion); colored cloths to highlight or contrast with art objects/pictures. (AM)

HPHS Prayer Team, Choir member, Methodist and member of Ascension Catholic Church,

The variety of images represented is thought and prayer provoking.

The Mexican art piece, "Procesion al Cielo," the parade/procession of people up the mountain – reminds me of our journey of life toward our eternal life – that message is important in dealing with grief and life's difficulties; Isaiah's prophesy of God's high mountain with all nations streaming to it – a sense of overcoming differences and joyfully coming together in unity.

Jesus of the People – expanding my image of Christ

The candles represent to me, hope, unity, and community. (SP)

HPHS Cantor, Ascension Choir member

I most enjoy the Mexican painting ("Procesion al Cielo") of all the people processing.

Also the Mexican art piece that represent Earth mother as a nursing mother.

I enjoy engaging with all the pieces that reflect our call to celebrate and care for creation.

I do appreciate that they are in different areas of the altar and feel the right ones are there – social justice, Black Jesus (Jesus of the People), ending gun violence, protection of the earth.

The music AND the reflective art together create a setting: We the people literally create and engage with the visual and auditory space where we have room to pray, heal and become one.

Beauty opens the door for it. (AR)

HPHS cellist, Hospital chaplain

Of the various reflective art pieces, "Procesion al Cielo" depicting the long up-to-heaven trail of people going back and forth on the rectangular painting was my favorite by far and I always look for it. It gives me a sense of my uphill journey some days but ultimately that I hope to ascend to heaven with this community of marchers! (MD)

Music and Communal Song as a Vehicle to Healing

Choir Member, Social worker, Hospice minister

My experience in hospice strongly supports my belief in music as an instrument in supporting individuals and groups in healing, community building. (JM)

Choir member, Nurse practitioner

Singing together and hearing collective voices make beautiful sung prayer and lifts my spirit. Singing together allows us to hear others and experience one collective voice community. We are one. (HS)

HPHS Prayer Team

I find choir and community singing to be very powerful. I often feel joy. When we sing together, we tune our voices to each other, requiring sensitivity to others, creating power in united voices. It helps me to feel connected to others and strengthens feelings of being part of a group. Connections to others – an important component in health and mental health. I recently saw a documentary “Alive Inside” <https://www.aliveinside.us/#land> about music as a therapy for people with dementia and psychiatric disorders and the organization Music & Memory. It was amazing and a testament to the healing power of music! (SP)

HPHS Prayer Team, MDiv student

Music is a wonderful instrument (again, no pun intended!) for healing. On a social/emotional level, choral singing very obviously connects us to one another, collecting our concentration and attention towards one end: prayer. Physiologically, the diaphragmatic breathing needed for singing can regulate heart rate and blood pressure virtually immediately. Spiritually, as the quote often attributed to St. Augustine says, "He who sings prays twice." (LF)

Choir member, Cantor

To sing together you must breathe together, you experience the same pauses, pulse, and rhythms. Singing together with others is very unifying. (AR)

Instrumentalist, Hospital chaplain

In the arts I see music having a healing modality. Music connects us often without words (as a cellist I am drawn to this when I play music in the hospital hallways). Music shifts how we hear, see, feel, and experience the world. How? Music offers us perhaps a shared language of listening, taking in, co-opting that leads to our souls being more open to transformation. (MD)

Choir member, HIV Nurse researcher

I've always felt an emotional connection with community/choir singing both in joyous celebrations and at times of loss and need for healing. Though hard to explain, I've often become unexpectedly moved while singing and seeing how the music enhances our (choir and community) shared experiences and draws us all together more intentionally. (MS)

HPHS Prayer Team, Choir member

We tune our voices to each other, perhaps allowing us to be more sensitive to each other. We sing in harmony, perhaps encouraging us to live in harmony. Our voices together are powerful and purposeful—a model for what we can do together in the world. (SP)

Instrumentalist, Therapeutic musician

In my ministry as a Therapeutic Musician, I see daily the power of music for healing. Music crosses cultural, religious, gender, political and economic differences in ways that equalize all people. (AOB)

Choir member, Wellness coach, Alternative healing practitioner

Of course, music is healing and unity!

“When all else fails, we sing ourselves sane.” (Barbara Holmes)

Listen to, play, or sing a favorite popular or sacred song. Music transcends boundaries. It transports you. Music is vibration. We are energetic beings. We resonate with many kinds of music, and thus get into sync with the vibes. Most of the music we make in church is acoustic, actual vibrations. One of life's beautiful natural highs is singing in church, singing with others in church along with organ or piano or drums, and feeling the vibrations move one, or even the hymnal with organ vibrations! Sung music has words, poetry, and vibrations. It's one of humankind's greatest achievements. (GO)

HPHS Prayer Team, UCC Pastor

Singing together carries us out of our isolation, our self-centeredness, our ego (once I stop worrying about whether my voice is tolerable or I'm singing the right notes!) and into a different dimension. Community singing inevitably joins us to others in a safe, shared experience. Sometimes when we are singing, I think, “Look what we can create together. What else can we do?” That in and of itself, I think, nurtures healing. (MG)

HPHS Prayer Team

The congregational music sets the tone and “stage” of invitation for those suffering, to feel safe and enveloped in love as they come for prayer and reveal vulnerability to another. (DA)

HPHS Prayer Team, Stephen Minister

Music can promote healing. It can be calming—relieving stress and anxiety.

It can lift spirits. Rhythm and melody are processed in different places in the brain than words – I have heard music described as a “whole brain” experience. I believe that aspect of music allows it to “sneak into us” and work in, what feels like, a mysterious manner. We may feel stirred inside as the music works in us in a way that is not completely rational. Music helps us to access how we feel when the rational part of our brain is trying to block the pain of those feelings. And it can help us to express difficult emotions when we are having trouble finding the words. (SP)

HPHS Prayer Team, Pastor, Seminary professor

I found all the choral music prepared by Ascension’s choir to be especially meaningful for services focused on healing. Part of the experience of being in the need of healing are feelings of isolation. Choir and community song breaks through those feelings providing a wider sense of community that one is not alone in illness or alienation. (RC)

Choir member, Nurse practitioner

Using my body to sing, my mind to comprehend the words, and my psyche and soul to absorb the melody and sentiment is balm for my being. (HS)

Prayer, Laying On of Hands, and Anointing

Choir member, Nurse practitioner

Re: The ritual anointing, I have never missed this part. Different from the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, I feel free to present my burdens, and bring also those of others, to the minister. Each Prayer team minister heard, and rephrased my presented need for healing, in the words of the anointing. The sensation of my head ‘held’ in their hands and the warmth of the oil on my forehead, makes the anointing real and symbolizes and makes present grace for my journey. (HS)

HPHS Prayer Team, Lutheran seminarian

At the three Fall 2023 services, I was one of the healing ministers, and at the October service, I also asked for healing prayer from another minister. Praying for others in this way is something that I consider to be a profound blessing, which is why I asked to do it. I was grateful to receive healing prayer from someone else, and I can honestly say it helped me. (LF)

Instrumentalist, Therapeutic musician

As a cradle Catholic, my only prior experience of anointing has been from a priest. It has been both freeing and moving to receive laying on of hands and anointing from women and people of other faith traditions. (AOS)

HPHS Prayer Team, Hospital chaplain

I participated in all but one service and served as a prayer team minister at five out of the remaining seven. I felt a sense of anticipation at these services; that although there were different levels of participation, everyone came with purpose to them. The variety was from observer to receiver of an anointing. People coming to be anointed seemed to have a hunger, I'm not sure individually for what, yet is seemed fulfilled and relieved after they left the station. There were heavy burdens shared often for another and then for themselves. I did not feel they came for answers or solutions but were looking for comfort, perhaps a lightening of their load even for a brief time. The participants embody both sufferings and courage. I am humbled to be God's mediator. (AM)

HPHS Prayer Team

My experience with interceding for others is - I am humbled and moved spiritually, emotionally, and mentally to be able to pray for the people who come for prayer. When I receive intercession myself, I feel a sense of hope, compassion, genuine concern and support when one of the prayer partners intercedes on my behalf - just as I feel it when praying for another! (DA)

HPHS Prayer Team, Pastor, Seminary professor

At each service (I ministered at 5 of the 7) I was struck with the honesty of what was shared regarding experiences of alienation or conflict within family systems. For me as a member of the team of ecumenical ministers, it was humbling to be entrusted with confidential and personal information by many of those who can forward for laying on of hands and anointing. The prayers provided were highly appropriate. (RC)

Choir member, Hospice social worker

I took part in the anointing prayer only once. I believe that human touch is sadly lacking in our society, and Covid did not help. We all need to feel that connection and having someone pray for/with you with that touch is very powerful. (JM)

Choir member, Nurse

My prayer minister was genuine, engaged, and seemed to sense that I needed more than the prayer I was asking for. The laying on of hands and anointing were especially comforting. (MS)

Instrumentalist, Hospital chaplain

I was moved to tears as I approached a female pastor. It was a new experience for me. I don't have those in my church tradition! Her invitation to prayer and my simple utterances in tears were met with a warm, loving, prayerful flow of words and gesture. I wish she would be leading my church! (MD)

Choir member, Alternative healing practitioner

I was delighted and grateful for the variety that each minister brought to the prayer stations—, the ecumenical/interfaith aspect, the depth of caring of each of them as they went into their beautiful spontaneous and spirit-filled healing prayers in their personal and tradition's style. (GO)

On Ecumenical Healing Prayer and Unity

HPHS Prayer Team, Lutheran seminarian

The ecumenical aspect is wonderful. Speaking very generally, I wish there were more inter-church cooperation like this. As a Lutheran woman, I am especially gratified to pray for/with Roman Catholic women whose spiritual leadership normally consists of all men. (I was privileged to take one of my seminary courses at Loyola, and I can confidently say that there is a deep need for Catholic women to have recourse to female spiritual leaders. About 1/3-ish of the Catholic women in that class expressed how they themselves felt anguish over discerning a call to the priesthood that they would never be able to realize. And 100% of them indicated how much they wished they could confess their sins to a woman.) I'm very glad and grateful to be able to pray for, with, and alongside women (and people of any gender, of course) who ask for it at these services. (LF)

HPHS Prayer Team, Hospital chaplain

Being a cradle Catholic in the pre-Vatican church where women were told not to even enter a non-Catholic worship space; it is a joy that [clergy and] ministers from other faiths are serving as leaders for these HPHS services at Ascension. Having attended a UCC Seminary was an important step in opening me to Ecumenism and the richness and gift of the experience in my life. These services are a small step to encourage me/us to expand our worldview. (AM)

HPHS Prayer Team, Choir member

Of course, ecumenism is very meaningful to me. I am a Methodist who belongs to a Roman Catholic Parish! Christians are all disciples of Christ. We have different traditions, different understandings of parts of Scripture, but at the core, we are the same family. (SP)

Choir member

Sometimes we categorize people of other denominations by differences and do not recognize all that we share. "Othering" is often destructive. Uniting is powerful and healing. We need to pray for open hearts, softened hearts – open to God and to all those we encounter. (SP)

HPHS Prayer Team, Pastor, Seminary professor

These services that built upon the Taizé model of ecumenical prayer actually deepened the engagement of participants by asking us to bring our prayers for healing and wholeness into the shared space for worship. The sharing of personal information that occurred at the prayer stations also deepened a sense of unity and community. (RC)

Instrumentalist, Therapeutic musician

Ecumenical prayer is a powerful unifying tool, giving people from different Christian traditions a means to pray together for common needs. Our dreams, pains, heartaches, and joys are often similar, but our faith traditions can be divisive. HPHS provides a way to worship with friends and family from other faith traditions and feel connected in our brokenness yet buoyed up in our hopefulness. Moving into 2024, our country's political turmoil is becoming a healing we need to be praying for. (AOS)

Choir member, Nurse practitioner

The ecumenical setting and context for this prayer only emphasizes our common needs as humans and as believers in a greater Mystery. Now is time for such unity and this prayer helps bring diversity to our altar. Such prayer for unity in diversity is needed in our fractionated world. (HS)

Instrumentalist, Hospital chaplain

Being Catholic, I felt my faith grow and my world expand as Christians gathered to share in prayer. In my naiveté I often forget the power of other Christian denominations. It was as if my faith is a drop in an ocean that is welcoming of all Christian faiths. I felt united and stronger in my own faith especially in seeking a blessing from a pastor of another tradition. (MD)

I couldn't have named it before, but I feel a connection (between "singing" and "unity") more concretely in these services over the past few months. I feel closer to people in the worship space in a spiritual way even if I don't get a chance to meet them at the snack time afterward. I hug people I know and strangers (I don't know) and feel a spiritual intimacy of sorts. It is very difficult to describe. (MD)

Choir member, Wellness coach, Alternative healing practitioner

Simply coming together and singing and praying together is a visible sign of unity. And adding in that intention makes it stronger. I've done many interfaith events and rituals through the decades to foster unity and healing. They can be so diverse, creative, even simple. These opportunities feed people, but also give a vision for what we need to do to create "heaven on earth." This is also called 5D consciousness where we act and live the way that (in our tradition) the Ascended Master Jesus taught us – love, forgive, help others. (GO)

Affirmations, Critiques, Suggestions

HPHS Prayer Team, Lutheran seminarian

*I want to affirm that you are acknowledging the need for both corporate and individual healing.
I want to affirm that you are calling out homophobia as problematic in a Roman Catholic space.
I want to affirm that the worship itself is carefully crafted to be visual (icons, other art), auditory (speaking, singing, silence), and experiential (oil, laying on of hands, candle procession).
I want to affirm that you have given people the option to pray both communally and individually.
I want to affirm that the services are ecumenical. (LF)*

HPHS Prayer Team, Pastor

I value the variety of music the choir sings and we sing, the variety of voices of the leaders, the rhythms of the prayers and blessings.

HPHS Prayer Team

I am not sure-personally-about the longer texts-that feel close to sermon(ettes). (MG)

HPHS Prayer Team, Choir member

I'd like us to think about ways to get the word out about these services.

A few days before each service I have sent email reminders to various members within the parish and to about a dozen non-Ascension friends who I think may be interested. (SP)

Choir member, Hospice social worker

No real criticisms, but wondering how to pull more people in, possible non-traditional Christians? As well as non-Christians? Not sure how that would work, but to create a place that someone feels welcomed, inspired, hopeful, and would want to return. (JM)

Choir Member, Minister of care to home-bound parishioners, nurse

I think HPHS has been absolutely wonderful. I would like to think about how to bring more folks in. Flyers around the village? More word-of-mouth efforts? I think once someone experiences the service, they likely will come back. It has been a great new project to be a part of. (SC)

Choir member, HIV Nurse

Though I know it's an ecumenical Christian service, I'm wondering if it could be possible to include/acknowledge more intentionally non-Christian faith traditions. (MS)

Instrumentalist, Hospital chaplain

Keep up the richness of the reflective images and environment around the altar as it is truly a spiritually alive part of the service. (MD)

Instrumentalist, Therapeutic musician

Although the music ministers for Healing Prayer, Healing Song are almost all from the same racial background, other elements of the prayer, i.e. planners, readings / readers, artwork, prayer texts, etc. reflect diversity and the unity that can come through our common prayer. (AOS)

Choir member, Wellness coach, Alternative healing practitioner

I LOVED the ecumenical/interfaith aspect of this ritual prayer, and the different ministers who anointed. I'm so used to women ministers, but I think for some people, this was new for them in such a wonderful way. I find the sharing of the light and candle procession ritual so inclusive and perfect for the prayer. (GO)

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