

Original citation:

ap Siôn, Tania. (2017) Creating a place of prayer for the 'other' : a comparative case study in Wales exploring the effects of re-shaping congregational space in an Anglican cathedral. *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 30 (2). pp. 218-235.

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Publisher's statement:

<http://doi.org/10.1163/15709256-12341356>

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Creating a place of prayer for the ‘other’: An ~~experimental~~ comparative case study in Wales exploring the effects of re-shaping congregational space in an Anglican cathedral

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Abstract

Provision of spaces for personal prayer and reflection has become a common phenomenon within historic churches and cathedrals in England and Wales, offering an example of devotional activity that operates largely outside that of traditional gathered congregations, but also in relationship with them. Over the past decade, the apSAFIP (the ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer) has been employed to examine the content of personal prayer requests left in various church-related locations, mapping similarities and differences in pray-ers' concerns. Building on this research tradition, the present study examines whether ~~experimental~~ changes to physical environment in an Anglican cathedral in Wales has an effect on the personal prayer activity occurring within it, with a particular focus on intercessory prayer requests.

Keywords: intercessory prayer, personal prayer, congregational studies, sacred place, cathedral studies, apSAFIP.

Introduction

Significance of place

The significance of place, in a physical and geographical sense, for human wellbeing (and, for some, wellbeing of the natural world) is explored and taken seriously from the perspectives of many disciplines. In *Spaces for the sacred: Place, memory and identity*, Philip Sheldrake (2001, pp. 2ff) draws on contemporary scholarship from human geography, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, history, architectural theory, literature, and theology, for example, to demonstrate the range of contributions to the study of place and to argue that today the ‘human sense of place is a critical theological and spiritual issue’ (p.1).

A position that is articulated frequently in this literature is the need for recognition of the contemporary importance of place for both individuals and communities, as well as recognition of the major shifts in Western societies that have affected relationship with place and the emerging consequences of that. Western post-modern societies are variously defined as ‘technological’, ‘global’, ‘networked’, sceptical of universal truth claims, focused on individualism, and highly mobile; while negatively phrased attributes include terms such as ‘rootless’ and ‘dis-placed’ (see, for example, Best & Kellner, 2001; Hassan, 1985).

In this portrayal of contemporary Western societies, spiritual quests for meaning, however, are seen as both persistent and distinctively shaped by the environments in which they are immersed. Such contemporary spiritual questing may be encountered in a variety of contexts. On the one hand, there is the growth of ‘online religion’ (Helland, 2000) which has been interpreted as ‘part of a [broader] shift in society towards ‘personal communities’ and ‘networked individualism’, with support and relationships increasingly provided through ever-changing, loosely-tied webs of connections maintained through digital communications’ (Hutchings, 2010, p.18). On the other hand, there is growth in spiritual and religious tourism (Stausberg, 2011; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005) as well as other kinds of significant spiritual connection with physical sacred place through activities like pilgrimage or visiting churches and cathedrals outside normal service times for opportunities to reflect and to pray, for example. This latter expression of spiritual questing raises a number of key questions about how people ‘belong’ to physical

sacred place and the various claims being made on such sacred place by the local inhabiting congregations and by others outside these communities.

Belonging and sacred place

Walker's (2006) approach to 'belonging' is especially relevant to this discussion because it has emerged from and been created for church-related contexts, taking seriously the complexity of different expressions of belonging with their challenges and opportunities in a range of empirical studies (Walker, 2009, 2010).

In 'Belonging to rural church and society', Walker (2006) sets out four kinds of belonging, which are grounded theologically and then applied to belonging as observed in rural church contexts, namely: belonging with people; belonging with activities; belonging with events; and belonging with places. In the present study, when drawing on this model, 'belonging with places' is of primary concern, alongside awareness of the relational factors also present with other kinds of belonging.

'Belonging with activities' involves connecting primarily through activities 'that take place on a regular and frequent basis and where individuals are expected to engage not just on a specific occasion but with the series'. Examples of these types of activities include, for example, Sunday services and various church groups and meetings. 'Belonging with people' involves connecting primarily through 'individuals who are associated with the church in the minds of others ... What they do is, to a greater or lesser extent, seen as the church doing it.' These people are described as including, for example, those who have formal positions in church and the local ministry team as well as the more informal. 'Belonging with events' involves connecting primarily through 'a range of events that engender belonging'. Examples of such events include the occasional offices, major festivals, fetes and other annual or one-off events. 'Belonging with places' involves connecting primarily with the physical place of church or churchyard. These places are often visibly located in the heart of the whole community, providing a sense of permanence that connects people with both the past and the future. They may be seen as spiritual or sacred places that draw people to them as part of their own spiritual quests, outside the activities and events offered. 'Belonging with places' is also often the most significant for those who do not live in the area and visit churches and churchyards for a wide variety of reasons (Walker, 2006, pp. 92-96).

Although these four categories of belonging are understood as being distinct

from one another, ‘belonging with places’ is described as important to all categories of belonging, and as such many claims are made on place in church contexts. In addition, it is often one kind of belonging, ‘belonging with activities’, which is largely responsible for shaping physical place and space, and for facilitating access to it. Those who primarily belong with activities are the gathered congregations; those who most frequently inhabit the church and most likely to be signed up members. Within this context, the relationship between one largely invisible group of people (who belong through places and are drawn to sacred places for personal prayer and reflection) with a visible dominant group of people (who belong through activities) may be identified as being of particular significance and an area for further exploration.

Personal prayer and sacred place

Since 2007 a collection of empirical studies has focused on informing understanding of the largely invisible visitors who seek opportunities for personal prayer and reflection in church-related contexts. Within this literature two aspects have been explored which are of particular relevance to the current study because of what they postulate about the complex relationships between physical sacred place and personal prayer and reflection.

The first aspect concerns the relationship between sacred place and personal prayer content which has been investigated by the application of the ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer (apSAFIP) to the content of personal prayers left in churches, cathedrals, hospital chapels, on the street, and online. Results have indicated that prayer content, in terms of prayer reference (who is prayed for), prayer intention (what is prayed for) and prayer objective (articulated prayer outcomes), has certain distinctive features that vary according to the place in which they are left (ap Siôn, 2015a, 2015b). In addition, prayers left in physical sacred places stand apart as being different in significant ways from prayers left online, on a church-related prayer website, for example (ap Siôn, 2012, 2016). This kind of mapping activity, enabled through multiple replications of prayer content studies, has raised significant questions concerning why these differences are discernable and in what ways these differences may be related to the specificity of place.

The second aspect explores the relationship between local church congregations and their provision of opportunities for personal prayer and reflection for those in the wider community. An exploratory study entitled, ‘Lighting candles

and writing prayers' (ap Siôn, In Press) surveyed twenty churches in North Cornwall to examine whether and how these churches provided 'intentional' spaces for visitors to engage in personal prayer and reflection outside their usual congregational service or other activity times. Results showed that among the churches surveyed there was a rich presence and diversity of practice in relation to opportunities for personal prayer and reflection, with just over half of the churches making some kind of explicit provision in the form of written prayer requests, votive candles, and memorial books, and this figure rose to nearly two thirds of the churches when 'other' possible examples of 'intentional' provision were included. The study concluded that the churches surveyed were exhibiting some kind of awareness of a relationship with and a ministry to those who visited their sacred places outside service times, and by its very nature, this awareness was specifically related to a sense of physical place.

Research question

Previous empirical research has demonstrated that the content of written intercessory prayer requests changes according to physical place. It has also been shown that there are a wide-range of different kinds of spaces created for personal prayer and reflection in churches. What is not known, however, is whether shaping the physical space in which prayer requests are written may also have an effect on the prayers left in churches and cathedrals. The present study seeks to compare prayer request activity in a cathedral over a four-year period in five key areas: prayer frequency, prayer length, prayer type, prayer relationships, and prayer content (using the apSAFIP), where space for prayer and reflection has been ~~experimentally~~ shaped. The opportunity to operationalize this research question arose from changes effected in Bangor Cathedral.

Location

Bangor Cathedral is situated in a central location on the High Street of the City of Bangor, in the northern part of this Anglican diocese. Within the Cathedral's Lady Chapel in the South aisle, visitors are offered the opportunity to pause, to reflect, and to pray, which includes the offering of personal written prayer requests. Although areas for personal prayer and reflective are present with votive candle stands placed variously around the main body of the cathedral at different times, the Lady Chapel in the South aisle has been an established location for personal prayer and reflection for

over a decade prior to the commencement of the study. The Lady Chapel is also the location of the aumbry containing the Blessed Sacrament.

The aim of the study is to explore whether shaping the physical space in which prayer requests are written has an effect on the prayers left in the Lady Chapel. The research context, therefore, sought to establish and delineate between two distinct shapings of sacred space for personal prayer and reflection, which are differentiated by their primary focus or orientation. Both shapings of the same space were implemented over a four-year period.

The first kind of sacred space was identified as ‘congregational space’. Within ‘congregational space’, congregational activity is the primary focus or orientation of the physical presentation of space. This may be manifested in a style of presentation where consideration for congregational activities such as worship and meetings dominate. Although opportunities for personal prayer and reflection may also be present in such a space, their position appears secondary to the congregational focus.

The second kind of sacred space was identified as ‘space for personal prayer and reflection’. Within ‘space for personal prayer and reflection’, personal religious or spiritual activity is the primary focus or orientation of the physical presentation of space. This may be manifested in a style of presentation where consideration for personal religious or spiritual activities such as sitting, lighting votive candles and writing prayer requests are given dominance. Although opportunities for congregational activities may also be present in such a space, their position appears secondary to the personal prayer and reflection focus.

In relation to the research context of the Lady Chapel, ‘congregational space’ was the normal style of presentation, as evidenced by key features present at the beginning of the study. The whole area of the Lady Chapel was filled with and dominated by numerous chairs with kneelers positioned in rows and orientated towards the altar on the East wall, suggesting that the primary focus in the Lady Chapel was Eucharist services. Additional and related furniture included three prie-dieu, a heavy oak chair, a credence table, and portable shelves and books (for use in services). Opportunities for personal prayer and reflection were also evident, although placed in secondary positions. The prayer board and a prayer pebble pool was placed in the rear corner of the Lady Chapel by the War Memorial, while votive candles by a statue of Our Lady were placed more prominently to the far side of the altar.

As the ‘congregational space’ was the normal kind of presentation in the Lady Chapel, a ‘space for personal prayer and reflection’ was created by removing all portable items from the Lady Chapel in order to provide a *tabula rasa* free of the usual arrangements and coding as a basis for shaping ‘space for personal prayer and reflection’. In this shaping of space, a different altar was brought into the Lady Chapel and placed in a freestanding location more towards the centre of the Chapel and the moveable statue of Our Lady was placed on the East wall, standing under the mediaeval relief sculpture of the crucifixion which itself was positioned immediately beneath the painted resurrection scene on the road to Emmaus. This move established links involving altar (Eucharist), Mary (Incarnation), Crucifixion and Resurrection. Votive candle stands were placed on either side of the stature of Our Lady. A well-proportioned table, a comfortable padded stool, and a spiral-bound book for written prayer prayers, together with a written prompt were introduced adjacent to the north end of the east wall. The printed prompt contained the message that all prayers within the prayer-request book would be offered upon the altar during a Eucharist every week. A single row of unobtrusive seating was provided along three sides of Lady Chapel for prayer and reflection. Finally, at the entrance to the Lady Chapel a simple notice announced the Lady Chapel to be a place for personal prayer and reflection. While the Lady Chapel was still accessible to particular types of congregational worship such as the small weekday Eucharist services or meditative vigils of Holy Week, for example, this space could no longer be readily used for other kinds of congregationally focused activity, such as meetings, choir practice or piano lessons, for example, without causing noticeable disruption to the space.

Full written and photographic records were made of both the ‘congregational space’ and the ‘space for prayer and reflection’. Over the four-year study period, the ‘congregational space’ was observable in the Lady Chapel in year 1 (2013), year 3 (2015), and year 4 (2016), while the ‘space for prayer and reflection’ was observable in year 2 (2014).

METHOD

Sample

The sample of prayers for analysis was drawn from the written prayer requests left in the Cathedral’s Lady Chapel over a four-year period. For each year prayers left during the months of May through to August were collated for analysis in order to provide

comparable data across the period of study. In 2013 the prayers were taken from what was identified as the original ‘congregational space’ and were pinned onto a prayer board. In 2014 the prayers were taken from the created ~~experimental~~ ‘space for personal prayer and reflection’ and were written in a spiral-bound book provided for this purpose. In 2015 and 2016 the prayers were taken from the return to ‘congregational space’ and were also written in the spiral-book used in 2014.

Analysis

The written prayers requests were analysed according to five selected areas of interest recognised in the research tradition concerned with the empirical study of written prayer request content. These five areas of interest include prayer frequency, prayer length, prayer type, prayer relationships, and petitionary prayer content. *Prayer frequency* was recorded for all four years of the study, while the remaining four areas of interest, namely prayer length, prayer type, prayer relationships, and petitionary prayer content were examined in year 1 (2013) and year 2 (2014) only.

Prayer frequency recorded the number of prayers left from May through to August in each of the four years of study. In research related to written prayer requests, noting the number of prayers left within a specified period of time is the most basic category in an analysis. No study, however, has sought to compare prayer frequency as it occurs through time and place.

Prayer length recorded the word count for each prayer in year 1 and year 2 of the study, and this is an aspect of prayer not usually recorded in the research literature. Prayer length was considered to be of relevance in the present study, however, to test whether shaping the physical space in which prayer requests were written and the kind of writing materials available (prayer request board or spiral-bound book) had an effect on how much people wrote to express their prayers.

Prayer type was recorded for each prayer in year 1 and 2 of the study and divided into three components articulated as questions: Is a prayer petitionary, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession? Does a prayer include a ‘thank you’ for prayer? Does a prayer refer to ‘answered prayer’? Various categorisations of prayer are used in the prayer request literature and from these a basic and classic differentiation between prayer which is petitionary, thanksgiving, adoration or confession was selected because previous studies have shown that these are easily recognisable in prayer request analyses (ap Siôn, 2015c, p. 140). Previous studies

have suggested, through exemplification of prayers, that there is also a different kind of ‘thanksgiving’ in prayer requests, which is oriented towards those providing the opportunity to write prayer requests (ap Siôn, 2015c, p. 141). In the present study, it was recognised that this common aspect is not captured in the aforementioned classic definitions of prayer types but is a significant recurring feature in written prayer requests, and for this reason, noting the frequency of prayers that say ‘thank you’ in this particular way was included. References to prayers that have been ‘answered’ have featured in various studies of prayer request content either in terms of frequency of occurrence or within exemplified material (ap Siôn, 2015a, pp. 176-177).

Prayer relationships was concerned with identifying the addressees of prayer (those to whom the prayers were addressed) for each prayer in year 1 and year 2 of the study, and comprised three main groupings: Community (either the cathedral community providing the prayer request facility or the community of fellow pray-ers who write and leave prayers on the prayer board or in the prayer book); The Divine (for example, God, Jesus, Spirit, saints, or prayers which are not explicitly directed through a human ‘intercessor’); and Others, living or dead, whom the prayer author addresses directly in prayer.

Petitionary prayer content was examined in year 1 and 2 of the study using the ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer (apSAFIP). The apSAFIP has been widely used and tested in a variety of church-related contexts for identifying trends in written prayer requests in relation to three core components styled as prayer reference, prayer intention, and prayer objective.

In the apSAFIP prayer intention distinguishes among eleven key areas with which the individual authors are concerned: health and illness, death, growth, work, relationships, conflict or disaster, sport or recreation, travel, housing, open intention, and general. As a broad guide the intention categories may exhibit the following features. ‘Health and illness’ includes prayers for physical and mental illness, addiction, pregnancy and birth, and continued good health. ‘Death’ includes prayers for people who have died and their families, and also long life. ‘Growth’ includes prayers for spiritual, religious, moral (that is, non-physical or material) growth. ‘Work’ includes prayers for jobs-related issues, education (such as school or university), exams or tests, unemployment, money, and legal cases. ‘Relationships’ includes prayers for partners and partnerships, explicit wider relationship concerns, as well as lack of relationships and loneliness. ‘Conflict or disaster’ includes prayers for

wars, disasters, accidents, poverty, and the natural environment. ‘Sport or recreation’ includes prayers for sport-related issues, hobbies and other recreational interests. ‘Travel’ includes prayers for holidays and travelling away from home, and transport. ‘Housing’ includes prayers for moving home, housing concerns, and lack of home (homelessness). ‘Open intention’ includes prayers that indicate the recipient for the prayer but include no other contextualising information. ‘General’ includes prayers that either have an affective intention only, without any concrete intention or are too non-specific to be placed in any other ‘intention’ category.

Prayer reference distinguishes among four key foci with which the individual authors are concerned: self (the prayer author), other people (friends, family and others known to the prayer author), animals (companion animals known to the prayer author), and the world or global context (people, animals, the natural world, events, for example, which have a wider global reference point beyond the personal and local community).

Prayer objective distinguishes between two effects that the individual authors envisaged as a consequence of their petitionary prayers: primary control (where desired outcomes of the request are stated) and secondary control (where no desired outcomes are stated). The primary control component of prayer *objective* was further delineated between prayer authors who requested material changes to the physical world and those who requested affective changes. The former is labelled primary control one (PC1) and the latter is labelled primary control two (PC2). Secondary control is referred to as SC.

Results

Comparing prayer frequency

The number of prayers left from May through to August for each of the four years of the study is presented in Table 1. In year 1 (2013) 162 prayers were pinned on a prayer board within ‘congregational space’. In year 2 (2014) 254 prayers were written in a spiral-bound book within ~~experimentally shaped~~ ‘space for prayer and reflection’, showing an increase of 57% when compared with year 1. In year 3 (2015) and year 4 (2016) 184 prayers and 172 prayers respectively were written in a spiral-bound book within re-established ‘congregational space’, showing an initial decrease of 28% in year 3, followed by a further decrease to 32%, in year 4. The results may point to the presence of a baseline for written prayer activity (when prayers are left in the normal default position of ‘congregational space’), which reveals the ‘spike’

effect of ~~changing experimental intervention when~~ space orientation ~~is changed~~ to ‘space for prayer and reflection’. In addition, the presence of the spiral-bound book for written prayer requests across both kinds of space in three years of the study appears not to challenge this contention.

Comparing prayer length

The word counts for individual prayers left from May through to August for year 1 (2013) and year 2 (2014) are collated in Table 2. The percentage figures show that the word count brackets above 30 words displayed only slight variation according to whether the prayers were pinned on a prayer board within ‘congregational space’ or whether they were written in a spiral-bound book within ~~experimentally shaped~~ ‘space for prayer and reflection’. There was more differentiation, however, in the word count brackets below 30 words, which show that the shortest prayers (no longer than 10 words) were more likely to be pinned on the prayer board in ‘congregational space’, accounting for 22% of the total prayer board prayers compared with 15% of the spiral-bound book prayers. At the same time, however, the most frequent word count for prayers left in both kinds of space was between 11-20 words, which accounted for around 30% of prayers. In addition, in both kinds of space, around 70% of all prayers left had word counts of no more than 30 words.

Comparing prayer type

The prayer type of prayers left from May through to August for year 1 (2013) and year 2 (2014) are collated in Table 3. The percentage figures show that there was only slight variation among the categories of prayer described as petitionary, thanksgiving, or adoration according to whether the prayers were pinned on a prayer board within ‘congregational space’ or whether they were written in a spiral-bound book within ~~experimentally shaped~~ ‘space for prayer and reflection’. In terms of prayers classified as ‘confession’, however, a major difference was discernable with 8% of all prayers left in the spiral-bound book displaying an element of ‘confession’, while there were no examples of this type of prayer among prayers pinned on the prayer board. As expected of written prayer requests left in a church-related building, the majority of prayers left in both kinds of space included petitionary elements (over 90%), although the elements of ‘thanksgiving’ prayer were surprisingly high (15% for the prayer

board and 18% for the spiral-bound book) when compared with previous studies (for example, ap Siôn, 2015a, p. 174).

The proportion of prayers that included a ‘thank you’ for the offering or receiving of a prayer was similarly high for both kinds of space, and particularly so for prayers left in the spiral-bound book where 22% of prayers said ‘thank you’ compared with 17% for the prayer board prayers.

References made to prayers that had been answered were equally low in both kinds of spaces.

Comparing prayer relationships

An overview of the nature of the prayer relationships visible in prayers left from May through to August for year 1 (2013) and year 2 (2014) is presented in Table 4.

Comparison of the two years highlights major differences in prayer relationships found in year 1 with the prayer board prayers and year 2 with the spiral-bound book prayers. As the results indicate, these differences are particularly evident in areas which show awareness of a prayer relationship involving community, with a stronger sense of ‘community’ manifested in the year two spiral-bound book prayers. In addition, for year 2, 18% of the prayers involving ‘community’ explicitly recognised the presence of other pray-ers within the spiral-bound book prayer community, which accounted for 9% of the total number of prayers written.

A more detailed analysis of the prayers reveals the presence of multiple prayer relationships in some individual prayers. With reference to the prayer relationships articulated in the prayer board prayers of year 1 (2013), of the 162 prayers, 148 (91%) articulated only one explicit prayer relationship conceived of as being with the Divine in 101 prayers (62%), or with the Cathedral community in 23 prayers (14%), or with Others living or dead in 5 prayers (3%), while 19 prayers (12%) expressed no explicit prayer relationship. The remaining 14 prayers (9%) articulated two explicit prayer relationships conceived of as being with the Divine and the Cathedral community in 8 prayers (5%) or with the Divine and Others living or dead in 6 prayers (4%).

With reference to the prayer relationships articulated in the spiral-bound book prayers of year 2 (2014), of the 254 prayers, 211 (83%) articulated only one explicit prayer relationship conceived of as being with the Cathedral community/prayer book community in 107 prayers (42%), or with the Divine in 101 prayers (40%), or with Others living or dead in 3 prayers (1%), while 19 prayers (7%) expressed no explicit

prayer relationship. The remaining 24 prayers (9%) articulated two explicit prayer relationships conceived of as being with the Cathedral community/prayer book community and the Divine in 22 prayers (9%) or with the Cathedral community/prayer book community and Others living or dead in 2 prayers (1%).

Comparing prayer content using the apSAFIP

The ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer (apSAFIP) was applied to prayers left from May through to August for year 1 (2013) and year 2 (2014) and the results are presented in Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7. In order to apply the apSAFIP to the prayers, the prayers were separated into individual prayer petitions. Of the 162 prayers left in year 1, there were 196 petitions, and of the 254 prayers left in year 2, there were 333 petitions.

Table 5 compares the prayer reference (which identifies for whom the prayer is intended) of the petitions in year 1 and 2. Although there is minor variation in the results for ‘other people’ known to the prayer author and ‘animals’ known to the prayer author and no difference at all in terms of prayer for ‘self’, there is a marked difference in the prayers with a ‘global’ reference, with 25 petitions (13%) among the prayer board prayers of year 1 and 70 petitions (21%) among the spiral-bound book prayers of year 2. Part of this increase may be attributed to petitions for other pray-ers in the book, which were categorized as ‘global’ in reference because those being prayed for were not directly known by the prayer authors.

Table 6 compares the prayer intention (which identifies the areas for which the prayer authors were concerned) of the petitions in year 1 and year 2. The distribution and frequency of the results for both years are very similar, apart from some variations in petitions for ‘relationships’ (4% in year 1 compared with 9% in year 2), ‘general’ concerns (24% in year 1 and 20% in year 2), and ‘disaster conflict’ (5% in year 1 and 8% in year 2).

Table 7 compares the prayer objective (which identifies the prayer author’s envisaged consequence of prayer) of the petitions in year 1 and year 2. The results show that although ‘primary control’ (directing the outcome of the prayer) was most prevalent in the petitions for both years, it was greater in year 1 (82%) than in year 2 (74%), and within ‘primary control’ there was also a slight preference in year 1 for ‘primary control 1’ (directing the outcome in material ways).

Conclusion

This study has been set within the two broad contexts of physical sacred place as typified by the historic churches and cathedrals in England and Wales and different kinds of belonging in relation to sacred place as defined by Walker (2006).

Recognising the complexity of relationships among place, congregations, and those who are drawn to churches and cathedrals for personal prayer and reflection outside congregational services and activities, this study set out to explore whether the shaping of sacred space by churches and cathedrals had any effect on the prayers left by those who are made visible predominantly by what they leave behind.

In the four-year study, two different kinds of space were established in the Lady Chapel of an Anglican Cathedral in Wales, where personal written prayer requests were left either on a prayer board or in a spiral-bound book. One space was identified as ‘congregational space’ with congregational activity as the primary focus or orientation of the presentation of space, and the other space was identified as ‘space for personal prayer and reflection’, with personal religious or spiritual activity as the primary focus or orientation of the presentation of space. Personal written prayer left in both kinds of space were analysed and compared according to prayer frequency, prayer length, prayer type, prayer relationships, and prayer content (using the ap SAFIP).

Five main conclusions are drawn from the results of these analyses, which build on existing research concerned with sacred place and prayer and have implications for cathedrals and churches in terms of enriching understanding and informing development of their provision for personal prayer and reflection. First, cathedrals and churches offer significant spaces for personal prayer and reflection for those outside gathered congregations, and there is evidence to suggest that the way physical space is shaped has observable effects on the written prayer requests, and by implication on those who write them. These effects were apparent in relation to prayer frequency, prayer type, prayer relationships, and aspects of prayer content.

Second, in terms of prayer frequency, it was observed that when space had been intentionally created with personal prayer and reflection as the primary focus, the number of prayers left in that space saw a marked increase when compared with the number of prayers left in the normal default position of ‘congregational space’. This may raise questions about whether a space explicitly shaped for and identified as a place for personal prayer and reflection may signal to those who use it that they are

welcome in that space and that the cathedral recognises and takes seriously its ministry in relation to them.

Third, in terms of prayer type, it was observed that 8% of prayers left in ‘space for prayer and reflection’ and in the spiral-bound book had a confessional element, which was an element wholly absent from prayers left in ‘congregational space’ and on the prayer board. It is unclear why this was the case. Perhaps the more formal and ‘permanent’ presentation of the prayers in the book, accompanied by a notice signaling that the prayers would be offered at a weekday Eucharist service prompted the appearance of this prayer type. It is also possible that the more focused and reflective environment in which people found themselves prompted such introspection. In addition, it would appear that those using the prayer facilities in ‘space for prayer and reflection’ were slightly more inclined to offer prayers of thanksgiving and more likely to show recognition of the presence and intentions of the cathedral community by saying ‘thank you’.

Fourth, in terms of prayer relationships, considerable differences were observed between written prayers left in the two kinds of spaces. Those leaving prayers in ‘space for prayer and reflection’ and in the spiral-bound book were much more likely to recognise explicitly that they were in some kind of relationship with the cathedral community and other pray-ers who were also writing prayer requests. This heightened sense of community is particularly interesting because it challenges and enriches understanding about what it may mean for this largely invisible group of people to belong to church. In addition, these results may encourage cathedral and church communities to reflect critically on how they shape space, knowing that their efforts in this expression of ministry may be both recognised and appreciated by those who engage with it.

Fifth, in terms of prayer content (using the apSAFIP) one of the main differences between the prayers left in the two kinds of spaces was concerned with prayer reference (which identifies for whom the prayer is intended). Considerably more prayers left in the ‘space for prayer and reflection’ had a global reference (that is, they had a reference point beyond the immediate daily lives of the prayer authors) when compared with prayers left in ‘congregational space’. This may be a reflection of a broader and more complex sense of relationships that has been stimulated by the ‘space for prayer and reflection’, to which other key results in the study also point.

To conclude, Walker (2006, p. 92) argues that ‘belonging as a theological concept is sufficiently powerful to demand the church pays full attention to it, both responding appropriately to its manifestations and promoting it at various levels of its work.’ The results of this study help to enable the Church to listen carefully and make an informed response to a group of people who belong in a distinctively hidden but present way, made visible by the signs that they leave behind in churches and cathedrals around England and Wales. By consciously creating ‘a place of prayer for the other’, which is sensitive to and respectful of the differences of the other, cathedral and church communities may be creatively challenged both in their perceptions of the depth of faith within alternative kinds of belonging and in how they act as key to enabling this faith to exist and to thrive.

Notes

This study is part of the Sacred Space and Prayer Project based at the University of Warwick and the St Mary’s Centre, Wales and jointly led by the Revd Dr Tania ap Siôn and the Revd Canon Dr Randolph Ellis.

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Table 1. Prayer frequency (years 1-4, May-August)

prayer year	prayer number
year 1 (2013)	162
year 2 (2014)	254
year 3 (2015)	184
year 4 (2016)	172

Table 2. Prayer length (year 1 - 2013 prayer board N=162; year 2 - 2014 prayer book N=254)

word count	year 1 (2013) prayer board		year 2 (2014) prayer book	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
0-10	36	22	38	15
11-20	48	30	80	3
21-30	28	17	61	24
31-40	17	10	28	11
41-50	12	7	21	8
51-60	10	6	8	3
61-70	6	4	4	2
71+	5	3	14	6

Table 3. Prayer type (year 1 - 2013 prayer board N=162; year 2 - 2014 prayer book N=254)

prayer 'type' *	year 1 (2013) prayer board		year 2 (2014) prayer book	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
petitionary	151	93	243	96
thanksgiving	24	15	46	18
adoration	3	2	9	4
confession	0	0	20	8
'Thank you' for prayer	28	17	55	22
answered prayer	5	3	6	2

* Note: one or more types of prayer may be present in one prayer.

Table 4. Prayer relationships (year 1 - 2013 prayer board *N*=162; year 2 - 2014 prayer book *N*=254)

relationship*	year 1 (2013) prayer board		year 2 (2014) prayer book	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
God/saint/direct	115	71	123	48
community A: cathedral	31	19	131	52
community B: board/book	0	0	24	18
others living and dead	11	7	5	2
no reference	19	12	19	7

* Note: one or more relationships may be present in one prayer.

Table 5. apSAFIP prayer reference (year 1 - 2013 petitions *N*=196; year 2 - 2014 petitions *N*=333)

prayer reference	year 1 (2013) prayer board		year 2 (2014) prayer book	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
other people	123	63	189	57
self	44	22	73	22
global	25	13	70	21
animals	4	2	1	<1%

Table 6. apSAFIP prayer intention (year 1 - 2013 petitions *N*=196; year 2 - 2014 petitions *N*=333)

prayer intention	year 1 (2013) prayer board		year 2 (2014) prayer book	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
general	48	24	68	20
health/illness	41	20	66	20
death	29	15	51	15
growth	27	14	36	11
relationships	7	4	30	9
disaster/conflict	9	5	28	8
work	15	8	24	7
open intention	13	7	20	6
sport	3	2	2	1
housing	3	2	0	0
travel	1	1	8	2

Table 7. apSAFIP prayer objective (year 1 -2013 petitions $N=196$; year 2 - 2014 petitions $N=333$)

prayer objective	year 1 (2013) prayer board		year 2 (2014) prayer book	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
primary control 1	9	5	3	1
primary control 2	151	77	245	74
secondary control	36	18	85	26