

A shared church

By [L. Gail Irwin](#)

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Years ago, on a Holy Land tour, I visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, considered by some Christians to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. I went back a few days later to a Sunday worship service of the Syrian Orthodox Church, and found it was conducted in a small alcove of the church for an ethnic Syrian congregation of about 50 people. Services of other churches were being conducted in other alcoves located off the main sanctuary. In a city as plagued by religious division as Jerusalem, I was struck by the ability of Orthodox and Catholic Christians to share space in this way.

Since that visit, I've often dreamed of a large church building where several churches, or even different faiths, might worship at different times in cooperation with each other. And my dream has come true in some places such as [Springhouse Ministries](#) in Minneapolis and the [Brookville Church](#) in Nassau. I've imagined that someday, one of those megachurches might be converted to a shared space church for small churches who can't afford their own buildings, like condos.

I also used to dream of starting a church in a mall. Just think of all that empty storefront space with big windows where people would walk by, look in, and see that we Christians aren't ogres after all!

Then I read [this article](#) about a mall in Ft. Myers, Florida, that converted all its retail space into churches, synagogues, and mosques: one stop faith shopping! As I listened to the article, alas, I realized it was a hoax, and a very funny one! But even in this played-up example of the "church mall," I recognized a piece of my dream.

From Wikipedia (a slightly more fact-based source than the site above), I learned that *simultaneum mixtum* is a term coined in 16th-century Germany for a church where public worship was conducted by more than one religious group. It is said to have been "a form of religious toleration" in the wake of the Reformation, stemming from a situation where both Catholics and Protestants needed worship space.

So it is not so new and cutting edge for churches to share space, and if they could do it in the heat of 16th-century Reformation conflict, we should be able to do it today. Today, the conflict wouldn't be about transubstantiation and consubstantiation. It would more likely be about who gets the kitchen on Saturday morning and who left wax stains on the carpet!

In your community, who might share church space with each other for mutual good and the glory of God?

*Originally posted at [From Death to Life](#)*