

Design Trends & Furniture:

More Than Just a Pretty Space

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Design Trends & Furniture - MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY SPACE

Changes in our culture, technology and even the global influences around us all, generate a deeper level of thought as ministry spaces are designed for today's church-goers. The design team, architect and owner should push and pursue a higher relational and experiential aspect for spaces where ministry occurs.

These elements now command a higher priority in the design and delivery of ministry, more so than just the mere look of the space. So how does space take on a character of impact and experience?

In a culture that yearns for connection and belonging, this may be the most important spatial creation a church can offer. Joseph Myers in his book "The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community and Small Groups" (Zondervan, 2003), offers the ideology that there are four spaces that we all belong to at any given time or in any given relationship — public, social, personal and intimate.

Encourage relationships

I believe these relational spaces are rationalized and supported through the way we design ministry space. For example, the "front porch" of public space could be a warm, inviting atrium or lobby where relationships are encouraged and community, conversation and connection are developed and supported.

The furnishings should include seating groups arranged to create various intimacy levels. This encourages and reinforces the opportunity to have conversation and connection with others. Churches should intentionally build areas for different levels of interaction with an emphasis on natural surroundings. Also opportunities for worship and teaching should be incorporated but it would all be in the context of communal space.

Adding smaller, traditional-style areas that promote family and togetherness of just a few individuals or small groups, help support the various levels of connection between public and interpersonal space.

When it comes to sacred space, it's important to understand that any space could be used for a worship setting. Our cultural trend is moving us from the need for designated worship areas to openness about where and how worship takes place. I believe corporate worship of some type will always have a place in the body of the church, but small group worship and individual worship are becoming legitimate forms, as well. In this larger gathering or community space, the large group progresses together, while smaller groups and individuals in other areas of the building have the option of self-directed worship experiences.

These more intimate spaces for worship could include hands-on, multi-sensory physical elements as a part of the worship experience. These ministry spaces discussed should facilitate a blending of the virtual and the physical.

Flexibly configured corporate worship spaces should move those worshipping from artistic digital presentations to an interpersonal connection with God that is so important to the entire worship experience. Moveable seating and staging allow for innovative floor layouts and interaction between the worshippers. Multiple projection screens, sometimes surrounding the worship space, will add to the layout flexibility and reinforce the important art forms of still shots and video.

Bricks and mortar

Bricks and mortar are probably not things of the past. We still need to stay dry and warm. However, these physical elements are no longer the single design tool used to create space. In fact, they may have less importance today for a culture that cries out for relationships and experiences just about anywhere they go.

Jim Couchenour, director of marketing and ministry services for Cogun, offers a list of key questions to keep in mind when considering ministry space design:

- Does the décor promote a sense of awe and wonder?
- Does the space allow for worship through the arts?
- Have we included physical icons that people can touch and experience with all their senses?
- Does the space provide an environment to worship God and experience community?

Places for ministry are more than just pretty spaces. Rather, they are an environment filled with rich opportunity for experience and connection, promoting a sense of community and relational value.

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