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CHURCH CAMPUS ENHANCEMENT FOR MAXIMUM MINISTRY EFFECTIVENESS: RESEARCH PROJECT

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CHURCH CAMPUS ENHANCEMENT FOR MAXIMUM MINISTRY EFFECTIVENESS:
RESEARCH PROJECT

A PROJECT DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
IN THE BARNETT COLLEGE OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
DENNY RODNEY DURON JR.

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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

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Date

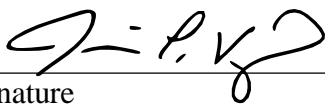
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ABSTRACT

The modern church in America needs to recapture the sacredness and significance of its facility to enhance its message, ministry, and mission in the community. The goal of this research study is to explore the benefits of church facilities designed to inspire and influence people to follow Christ. Jesus promised us, “For where two or three gather in my name, I am there with them” (Matt 18:20). In one sense of the word, a church campus is a representation of Christ in the community. Therefore, facilities management is the proper stewardship of our ministry. The mission that Jesus gave the church forms the purpose of church facilities usage. Shreveport Community (SC) Church made facility enhancements to research the effect it would have on the mission of SC Church: To make disciples of Jesus Christ. The intent of this dissertation is to discover what effect exists between the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a church facility and the life experience (spirit, mind, and body) of the SC Church congregation and the Shreveport community. The dissertation project studies the positive impact of quality church facilities through a theological review, literature review, and research project. Kid City Parties (KCP) is a facility within SC Church that underwent intentional facility enhancements for the research project. A quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design was used for study purposes in evaluating the efficacy of KCP changes enacted since 2020.

Dedication

To my amazing wife, Sarah.

Thankful we completed this journey together.

You are my greatest inspiration.

To my incredible kids,

Doc, Daisy, Kennedy, and Noa.

You are my everything.

Acknowledgments

Thank you, Dr. Kent Ingle. Your vision for SEU has changed my family's lives and my church's future. The experiences my family has had through SEU over the years are priceless. Thank you for your faithful leadership.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROJECT INTRODUCED

Introduction

In seeker-friendly churches, new intentional processes have been created to make the church more approachable for new believers, but the outcomes have been that the church is viewed as less sacred and holy than before. There has been an emphasis on a personal and individual relationship with God rather than a church and a community relationship with God. The consequences are not all known but one of the results has been a generation of shallow noncommittal churchgoers and attitudes in the Western World.

What is allowed today in many churches would never have been allowed in the past in the church facility, especially concerning respect for the church building, individual direction in discipleship, wardrobe apparel on the platform and in the congregation (hats and shorts), flippant sermon banter, loss of altar time, loss of the church building being the center of family life, and the list goes on. This list should not be viewed as what is happening as either right or wrong, but it is evident that times have changed. A question that must be addressed is the following: If respect for the church facility has suffered, how can the holiness of the church gathering be restored? The church needs a new appreciation for and in the gathering locations of the church.

Kinnaman references Barna's work in 2011 observing 18–29-year-olds who grew up in the church. The study discovered that 59 percent of them dropped out of church when they left home. The same study conducted in 2018 revealed an increase of church dropouts to 64 percent.¹ However, a steady group of young Christians continues to go to church and is seen as “Exiles” to

¹ David Kinnaman, Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 15.

the culture around them. Kinnaman reveals in this study that “10 percent of young Christians amounts to just under four million 18–29-year-olds in the U.S. who follow Jesus and are resiliently faithful. In spite of the tensions, they feel between church and everyday life, they keep showing up.”²

The place where they continue showing up is the local church that has a central facility. Also, the research revealed that the ones who do stay, and are what Kinnaman called “resilient disciples,” believe there is more to be done outside the walls of the church than inside.³ The focus of this research will be to identify the existence, enhancement, and expansion of the church in furthering Christ’s mission inside and outside the walls of the church.

The writer of Hebrews says, “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25). The author could have said not to neglect worshipping together, praying together, or serving together, but he chose to reveal the necessity of the church gathering in one place by commanding us not to neglect “meeting together.”

It could be argued that the place of the gathering is the most sacred act that God created for humanity to be involved in. Church facilities facilitate the gathering of people. Church facilities embody the church that Jesus will return to claim. If the gathering is that monumental to Christ, then the location of the gathering is meant to be sacred and holy. This study seeks to explore church facility existence, enhancement, and expansion to establish the sacredness and holiness of the gathering place. The proposed research will engage five key components: the

² Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 32.

³ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 32.

mission of a church facility, the theology of church facilities, incarnation theology, community impact, and evaluation of the findings.

Topic Relationship to the Ministry of the Researcher

This project will consider the relationship between the facilities of Shreveport Community Church and the mission of Christ within both the church and its local community. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Christ’s mission is to save those who are lost. Jesus shares His mission with the disciples when he states: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). The church’s mission is to follow Christ’s mission. The mission statement of Shreveport Community Church, hereafter referred to as SC Church, asserts that every aspect of ministry is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” The church’s mission for facilities is likewise to lead those who are lost to experience the love of Jesus.

A short history of SC Church must start at the beginning. First Assembly of God in Shreveport was established in 1927. Rodney Duron was a traveling evangelist before he became First Assembly’s pastor in 1957 in a small church building in a struggling part of town. The church’s growth was slow at the start, but Pastor Rodney Duron heard from God that “the best is yet to come.” This promise became the mantra for the church, and the congregation began to grow through Pentecostal preaching, worship, local outreach, and community.

When the congregation outgrew the first building, the church sold the facility and purchased land across town in West Shreveport. First, the gymnasium was built, and then the sanctuary; years later, a larger sanctuary was erected. The church continued to grow spiritually

and numerically during the 80s and 90s. West Shreveport's local community was positively impacted while crime rates drastically fell due in part to First Assembly's presence. The church facility served to lead others to become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Denny Duron Sr. became the pastor in 1998, and the church was renamed "Shreveport Community Church." Pastor Denny Duron Sr. declared that every building on the campus would serve the church community, as well as the local community. The sanctuary is the centerpiece of the complex, and Evangel Elementary is in the same building serving children from K-5 to sixth grade. In 2008, SC Church built SC Café, Kid City, and Evangel Learning Center, all within the church complex.

The SC café offers specialty coffees, food, and a three-story playscape for the kids, and is open to the public seven days a week. Kid City has a theatre, arcades, and a party room for SC Kids church events and is a birthday party venue on the weekends open to customers. Evangel Learning Center is a daycare for kids six weeks old to four years old. In the first year of these facilities being in operation, 30,000 people walked through the doors, and many of them did not attend SC Church.

Denny Rodney Duron Jr. and Sarah Duron became the lead pastors in 2021, and the vision for facilities was to continue the legacy of Pastor Rodney and Denny Sr. in leading people to Jesus through building God's church. The existence, enhancement, and expansion of SC Church's facilities play a vital role in SC Church fulfilling the mission of Christ.

Winner's Circle International is a 501c3 organization that was founded by the senior pastors Denny and DeAnza Duron. This organization shares the gospel through preaching, worship, outreach, and education. Winner's Circle and SC Church work together on many ministry projects. Throughout the years, there have been multiple buildings gifted to Winner's

Circle International that SC Church has supported. A water park, a country club, and a church are just a few of the gifted locations.

Some of the properties were beneficial for a season, and some of the properties have been a burden. Understanding which locations fit Christ's mission and which ones are a distraction is vital. How do you determine if a property is beneficial to the church's mission and when it is not? How do you determine if the church building is in line with Christ's mission? SC Church will benefit from a theology that will determine the effectiveness of church facilities in relation to Christ's mission in the community.

Historically, the church has utilized buildings in different ways for different reasons, but SC Church seeks to define how to plan a building location to be the most effective for God's Kingdom. Kid City Parties (KCP) will be the focus of the research. Kid City serves as the kids church location for events and a birthday party service on the weekends. The birthday party venue is available to both the church community and the local community where the customer receives the private party room, the arcade room, and the option for a movie in Kid City Theatre. The study will conduct a quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design that will be used for study purposes in evaluating the efficacy of KCP changes enacted since 2020. Interviewing KCP's customers and evaluating findings will determine the effectiveness of Christ's mission in SC Church's facilities.

Contextual Scope and Limitations

The research for this project will not be a comprehensive study of all churches and denominations. The project will be limited to Kid City Parties (KCP) customers within SC Church's facilities. The interviews will be limited in measuring the effects of serving, updating, changing, and maintaining excellence in SC Church's facilities. The KCP interviews will be limited to customers after the facility and functional changes have been made to KCP areas.

The quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design will reveal if changing the functionality of the facilities results in a greater awareness of Christ's mission in the users. A quantitative survey measuring customers' experiences with church facilities in relation to Christ's mission is limited to the one case of KCP. The patterns of the interviews will result in a measurable method of evaluating SC Church's missional effectiveness through a church facility with community functionality.

The questions are limited in that the study will be a posttest-only research design regarding the topic of church facilities at SC Church. The results of the interviews will be contingent on the customers who have had a party after functional changes have been made to the facility and the users' willingness to be truthful. The questions have been prepared to reveal missional understanding, church facility awareness, facility functionality, and the cause-and-effect relationship between investing in excellent facilities and Christ's mission. The church's mission will be defined as universal for all church buildings and ministries as sharing the love of Christ.

Definition of terms

- Church's mission or Christ's mission in facilities: to lead others to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.
- Church facilities or church buildings: any location used as a consistent gathering place for the local church body.
- Existence: the creation of a church facility or location.
- Enhancement: the excellence in maintaining and caring for an existing church facility.
- Expansion: the growth of a church facility attendees' spiritual, numerical growth, and community impact.
- Local Community: the local community surrounding the church location.
- Church Community: the attendees of a church location.
- Awareness: Sacred spaces dedicated to worshipping Jesus Christ.
- Incarnation Theology: the gathering of the local church in a church facility is a representation of the incarnate Christ.

Research question

What effect exists between the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a church facility and the life experience (spirit, mind, and body) of the SC Church congregation and the Shreveport community?

Project Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal will reveal the relationship between the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a church facility and the life experience (spirit, mind, and body) of the SC Church congregation and Shreveport community. The goal will be accomplished through engaging in biblical research, theological studies, contemporary literature, and quantitative research.

The first goal is to study the existence of locations where people experience God's presence individually or in groups throughout the scriptures, throughout history, and in the present church. The first objective for this goal will be to research a selection of locations in the Old Testament and New Testament where God engages with people consistently. The second objective is to establish the existence and necessity of consistent gathering locations for the church through studying the patterns of the OT, the NT, and the present church.

The second goal is to learn the best ways to enhance church facilities through operating in excellence. The first objective for this goal will be to research contemporary literature engaging present day churches that model excellence in the functionality of church management. The second objective will involve making enhancements to Kid City Parties by upgrading the facilities, upgrading the functionality of the facilities, and upgrading the processes within the facilities.

The third goal is that church facility enhancement will result in the church's expansion spiritually and numerically. The first objective will involve a quantitative study of KCP customers, after facility enhancements have been made, to determine successes and failures in achieving Christ's mission. The second objective is to determine patterns of successful church

facility characteristics through studying the OT sacred locations, the NT church locations, the modern-day church locations, contemporary literature, and the KCP quantitative survey.

Research Methodology

The methodology utilized for this project involves four components. First, the methodology will engage primary and secondary sources including but not limited to books, literature reviews, academic journals, the Southeastern University Steelman Library database, various internet databases, interviews, and internet search engines. Next, the biblical and theological research will be explored through biblical commentaries, D.Min. and Ph.D. dissertations, and the direction of the dissertation committee.

The third stage will engage a quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design of Kid City Parties (KCP) customers. The interview questions will be focused on the existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facility functionality resulting in Christ's mission in the church community and the local community. The final stage will take into consideration all the research, interview results, and biblical findings to improve the existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facilities at SC Church.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The quantitative interviews will provide an evaluation to reveal the hypothesis's accuracy. The evaluation is not an interview for church members or an interview regarding the actual church service. Rather it focuses on a church facility that exists within the church, has been enhanced by the church, to expand the church, and serves the church community and the local community. The quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design observes the results of the

enhancement of facilities and facility functionality after the 2020 facility functionality enhancements were performed.

The 2020 KCP enhancements targeted the lack of communication to partygoers about SC Church, Sunday services, Evangel Christian Academy, and the love of Jesus Christ. The survey seeks to reveal how enhancing the facilities and functionality of facilities results in people coming to SC Church and the awareness of Jesus. The mission of church facilities is to point people to Jesus.

The church must have a renewed confidence in the power of the gathering location and church facility. The church is not limited to the confines of a church facility but called to impact the church community and local community. The theology of why a church facility is important will continually reveal the pattern of existence, enhancement, and expansion for the believer spiritually and in community.

The research from Shreveport Community Church and Kid City Parties will reveal a practical application of enhancing facilities to result in expanding the mission of Christ. Engaging the scriptures, contemporary sources, interviews, and quantitative research will provide a greater understanding of the importance of church facilities. The focus of this research will reveal the impact of the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a church facility on the life experience of the Shreveport Community Church congregation and the local Shreveport community.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The scriptures provide countless examples of people who have built structures to honor God. If one is to explore human nature as it relates to worshiping God, people have consistently valued creating a physical place for God. A selection of biblical locations where God met with people, where He gave instructions to erect or built a special place, facilities that the early church gathered in, and altars that were built to honor God will explore the existence, enhancement, and expansion of church locations. Interviews with present-day church leaders and architects will explore the parallels with biblical patterns concerning the existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facilities. A study on sacred locations, facilities, and altars will offer the structure of biblical and present-day church locations.

Theological and Biblical Dimensions

Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines a holy place as “a holy place in the sense of being a place set apart for Yahweh.”¹ Throughout the Bible, some locations are holy, sacred, set apart, and consecrated for God. Psalm 24:1 declares, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” The Lord is holy, and whatever the Lord possesses is holy. Leviticus 11:45 states, “I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore, be holy, because I am holy.” A God who is holy created a world that is holy. The earth

¹ Chad Brand, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 773.

and humanity are living in a fallen state, but the earth and humanity can be redeemed as holy. Humankind is made in God's image and is therefore holy. The argument should not be what can be viewed as holy and what cannot be categorized as holy. The objective should be to view all people and places as being created and redeemed to be holy.

Anything consecrated to God is set apart as holy for God's purposes and will. *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words* states, "The verb *qadash* means 'to set aside, to consecrate, or to make holy,' and can refer to people, things, times or places. The verb always carries the connotation of 'setting aside for religious purposes.' It comes from the Hebrew noun *qodesh* meaning 'a holy thing' or 'holiness.'"² The first use of *qadash* in the Bible is the account of the seventh day of creation, when God set aside the Sabbath day as holy (Gen 2:2-3). The second use of *qadash* is the account of God declaring the place where Moses stands as holy ground because of God's presence in that location (Exod 3:5).³

God consecrated a specific place because Moses experienced the presence of God in a specific location. Moses took his shoes off in obedience and reverence to God's presence in that place. The theme of consecrated holy locations will be revealed throughout this section through numerous people and places including Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, and Paul. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul declared, "consecrated, sanctified in Jesus Christ. We are called to live holy lives, putting off the wicked and immoral practices of this world" (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11). We are consecrated to God through the gospel and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 17:17; 2 Thess 2:13).

² Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 40.

³ Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*, 40.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the church became the living body of Christ on earth. The temple of Jesus Christ is the gathering of Christians. Wherever the gathering of Christ's followers takes place, Jesus' presence is experienced in a special way. Jesus promises, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt 18:20). The gathering of believers is consecrated, holy, sacred, and set apart. The Sabbath day is not worshipped, the place of gathering is not worshipped, and the gathering itself is not worshipped. Rather, all three are vital components to living an obedient life consecrated to Jesus and set apart for His divine purpose. God will consecrate a sacred person, gathering place, or building that is set apart for His purposes.

Holiness alone is not to be worshipped, but God is to be worshipped in His holiness. We see the pattern of Adam and Eve as God creating holy people to experience God, love each other, work in the location God placed them in, and multiply. God is to be worshipped and God alone. The other aspects of creation are to be sacred and holy but never to be worshipped. Laura Varnam, lecturer on Medieval Literature at the University of Manchester, exposes insights into the history of church buildings in her book *The Church as Sacred in Middle English Literature and Culture*. In the Middle Ages, the consecration ceremony of the church building was vital for its sanctity.⁴ Using Jacobus de Voragine, chronicler in the medieval church for the archbishop of Genoa, Varnam describes his first-hand account of a consecration ceremony. In it, Voragine presents its five purposes:

The first is to drive out the devil and his power [...] Secondly, the church is consecrated in order that those who take refuge in it may be saved. [...] The third purpose is that

⁴ Laura Varnam, *The Church as Sacred Space in Middle English Literature and Culture* (Manchester, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 34.

prayers offered in the church be surely heard. [...] The fourth reason for the consecration of the church is to provide a place where praises may be rendered to God. [...] Fifthly, the church is consecrated so that the sacraments may be administered there.⁵

Every consecration is made to exalt the name of Jesus through fighting darkness, accepting salvation, being a house of prayer and worship, and a place to administer the sacraments.⁶ Although the consecration ceremony reflects medieval Catholic theology, the truth transcends all denominations. The church building is to be consecrated as the House of God and a place that belongs to Jesus. If the building is set aside as a consecrated location, then it serves a sacred purpose to the body of Christ.

For the Israelites, all pieces of property belonged to God. Leviticus 25:23 states, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.” The land throughout the Bible did not belong to exclusively the Israelites; they saw themselves as stewards of God’s land.

The church will not be silenced

Mary Farag, historian of Christianity at Princeton Theological Seminary states, that in the days of the early church, the Romans did not allow Christians to own land or construct church

⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Dedication of a Church*, in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, Trans., ed. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 385.

⁶ de Voragine, ‘Dedication of a Church’, 385.

buildings because Christianity was not recognized as licit under the Roman government.⁷ House churches, synagogues, temples, and open spaces were the only options for gathering when the Apostles began to spread the gospel. “You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions” (Heb 11:34).

The early church was not allowed to own or build buildings and had to meet wherever they could. The early church was persecuted, not given land, not given the means to construct buildings, and not recognized as a legitimate religion. However, the early church thrived and continued to expand despite stark opposition. The early church continued to gather through persecution and gives assurance that the church of today cannot be silenced through opposition. The church will continue to meet, continue to grow, and still gather in times of peril following the example of the early church.

The Christian church was not established by the Roman government as *res sacra* until the fourth century by Emperor Constantine.⁸ Farag writes, “Jurists and bishops in the Roman Empire were the ones who made, identified, and controlled ‘sacred things’ (*res sacra*). Jurists’ writings (especially laws) and bishop’s decisions that were codified into ecclesial laws (called ‘canons’) supply evidence for their regulatory practices”⁹ There was no way to deconsecrate a place or sacred thing in the Roman Empire. Farag adds, “In fact, *res sacra* (sacred things) were unowned, so there was not even a designated legal proprietor who could desacralize the property.”¹⁰

⁷ Mary Farag, *What Makes a Church Sacred? Legal and Ritual Perspectives from Late Antiquity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021), 12.

⁸ Farag, *What Makes a Church Sacred?*, 12.

⁹ Farag, *What Makes a Church Sacred?*, 12.

The Emperor was the only person that could take away the status of a *res sacra*. If the Christians did not abide by the Roman expectations for sacred locations, they could be taken away through individual cases.¹¹ However, the church thrived despite the Roman government's rejection and persecution of the church. If a location was not given or if it was taken away, it did not stop the spirit of God from moving and the church could not be silenced. The location that is holy, consecrated, and sacred to God serves as a facilitator to what God wants to accomplish. What makes something holy is that it was created by God. What makes something sacred is when it is consecrated to God. Once the believer consecrates something, dedicates it, and sets it apart, that is when holiness is ascribed to it. We read in Romans 12:1: "I urge you brothers to present yourselves holy and acceptable to God." Throughout the Bible, people consecrated locations, altars, monuments, and buildings to the Lord.

All Scripture is God-breathed

The Assemblies of God's sixteen fundamental truths begin with the Scripture being inspired. The first article of truth states, "The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct."¹² The Bible is one continuous book that offers truth from beginning to end. The NT is a continuation of the OT. The NT begins from the OT as Jesus Christ is the descendant of Abraham and the son of David. Romans 15:4 states: "For everything that was written in the past

¹⁰ Farag, *What Makes a Church Sacred?*, 12.

¹¹ Farag, *What Makes a Church Sacred?*, 16.

¹² "Assemblies of God 16 Fundamental Truths," Assemblies of God, effective October 5, 2022, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#1>.

was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”

The scriptures Paul mentions is the Old Testament. 2 Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” Everything in the Bible is God-breathed and can be used to teach the believer. The way the scriptures portray the sacredness of places, facilities, and altars that glorify God cannot be overlooked. The Old Testament and New Testament will be referenced intermittently as one book that tells one story throughout these sections. The biblical theology consists of three areas: sacred places, sacred buildings, and sacred art.

Sacred places

Earth – God created the place. God created the heavens and the earth and everything within them. God created a place and nurtured it. Again, Psalm 24:1 states, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” A place did not exist until God created the earth for people to dwell in. David Burrell’s *Creation and the God of Abraham* reveals the power of God creating the heavens and the earth from nothing. Burrell writes: “*Creatio ex nihilo* is a foundational teaching in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It states that God created the world out of nothing – from no pre-existent matter, no space or time.”¹³ The theology that God created a place out of nothing reveals that all creation came from within God.

¹³ David B. Burrell et al., *Creation and the God of Abraham* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

God created and began the existence of the heavens, the earth, and everything within the entire universe. Nothing exists without God. God says in Revelations 1:8: “I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end. I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.” In a very methodical, intentional, detailed, and exquisite creation, God formed the place in which humanity exists. After the creation, God says in Genesis 1:31, “Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!”

Some scholars have drawn a parallel between the Temple being a microcosm of creation and the Garden of Eden.¹⁴ Isaiah 66:1 states, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool, what is the house you would build for me? And what is the place of my rest?” John D. Barry states, “The point here is not that God has no need for a temple, but that all creation is truly God’s temple.”¹⁵ To believe humanity can create anything that God does not already possess is ignorance. However, the house of God is for the body of Christ.

God created the earth, constructed the Garden of Eden, and met with Adam and Eve in the created place. The earth was created out of nothing, but once the earth was formed, God began bringing order to the earth. The other days of creation consist of taking the elements that were formed out of nothing and multiplying them, dividing them, manipulating them, constructing them, and continuing creation to form God’s majesty on earth.

Garden of Eden – God built a place. The mere existence of earth was not enough for God. God enhanced a place within the earth that existed for Adam and Eve called the Garden of Eden. God

¹⁴ Jon D. Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (July 1984): 285.

¹⁵ John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), “The Garden of Eden,” “The Garden as Temple”

used the elements that had already been created to form Adam and made a specific place for humanity within the created earth (Gen 2:8-14). God created Adam first and then created a specific place for Adam.

Adam's existence and being placed in the garden came with special instructions from God for Adam to steward the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:15 states, "The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it." Adam was instructed to work, steward, rule, and care for the place and creatures that God had created even before the fall. God established values in obedience, responsibility, stewardship, and purpose for the place that was intentionally created for humanity.

The Garden of Eden possesses symbolism associated with the Tabernacle and the Temple. The garden of Eden and the Temple are both oriented eastward (Gen 2:8). The Garden of Eden and the future Jerusalem both have rivers described as flowing from them (Gen 2:10-14; Ezek 47:1-12).¹⁶ The Garden of Eden and the Temple also draw the parallels that involve gold and onyx, working and keeping, a place of rest, and fellowship with God.¹⁷ Another parallel is the cherubim Temple imagery and the cherub that guarded Eden after the fall.

John D. Barry, in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, states, "Furthermore, the fact that the cherub was to 'guard' the entrance to the garden suggests that Adam's 'guarding' was also protecting sacred space. In light of all these parallels, it is possible to suppose that the Garden of Eden was understood to be the archetypal temple of God."¹⁸ The existence of the Garden of Eden

¹⁶ Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, "Garden of Eden," "The Garden as Temple".

¹⁷ Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, "Garden of Eden," "The Garden as Temple".

¹⁸ Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, "Garden of Eden," "The Garden as Temple".

was constructed by God for humanity to experience God's presence and to enhance what God had given.

The Garden of Eden was formed to be the place where Adam and Eve walked with God, were stewards of the land, and were fruitful and multiplied. Genesis 1:28 states, "Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern over it.'" From this verse, it appears there were no barriers that kept them inside the garden. God's plan was for them to go from the garden and into all the earth and back to the tree of life. The expansion of humanity was always in the original plan of creation. The God of Genesis continually makes it clear that reproduction is blessed and promises the patriarchs that they would have innumerable descendants.¹⁹ Expansion of the human race and taking more domain of the earth was in the original plan of creation. The Garden of Eden exemplifies the existence, enhancement, and expansion of God's plans concerning a place.

Peniel – Jacob fights in a place. The account of Jacob naming Peniel provides another aspect of encountering God's presence in a place. Jacob sent his family and possessions ahead of him to cross a river and he stayed behind alone. While he was alone, he found himself wrestling with God and refused to let go until he was blessed by God (Gen 32:22-32). God blessed him and renamed Jacob Israel. After this encounter with God, Jacob immediately renames the place Peniel. The meaning of Peniel translates as "the face of God" (Gen 32:30). He experienced God in such a real way that he wanted to honor the place where he had fought, was blessed, and

¹⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 61.

encountered God. Jacob goes on to say, “yet my life was preserved” (Gen 32:30). He confesses that his life is at the mercy of God’s hands through a spirit of gratitude.

As Jacob got up to leave, the sun was rising (Gen 32:31). He fought all night at Peniel, and the sun shined on his path as he left the place. William David Reyburn and Euan McG Fry state: “Then Jacob passed Peniel: passed may mean ‘passed through,’ ‘passed by,’ or ‘crossed over.’”²⁰ In the sacred place, the believer will fight for a breakthrough, receive blessings, receive a new identity in Christ, experience God’s presence, display gratitude, and receive victory in one battle to cross over to the next. The sacred place is where believers wrestle for the blessings of God.

Jacob’s Well – Jacob surrenders in a place. Jacob’s Well is a significant place and is involved in many of the patriarchs of Israel’s important moments throughout scripture. Jacob’s Well is considered the most authentic of all the “holy places” in Israel because the location is without dispute.²¹ Jacob journeyed to Shechem after making peace with his brother Esau. Jacob seeing Esau’s face and experiencing his forgiveness was comparable to seeing the “face of God” (Gen 33:10). Shechem was the first place Jacob traveled to after seeing his brother Esau. There, he purchased land, where he made his first altar to God (Gen 33:20). Jacob named the altar *Elohe-Israel* meaning “God is the God of Israel.”²²

²⁰ William David Reyburn and Euan McG Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1997), 768.

²¹ Parrot André, *Land of Christ; Archaeology, History, Geography* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1968), 65.

²² Reyburn and Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, 784.

Jacob surrenders at a place by proclaiming that God is his God. Shechem is the place Jacob surrendered and declared God as the one true God and is a sacred place in the history of Israel and remains a holy place still today. A sacred place is a place of surrendering to God. Amy L. Balogh states, “Shechem was an urban center in the central hill country from Middle Bronze I (1900–1750 BC) until its destruction by the Assyrians in 724 BC. It later became a holy city to the Samaritans (330 BC) until Jewish forces destroyed it in 107 BC.”²³

Shechem is a sacred place of continual surrender, heartache, and experience with God throughout scripture. Shechem is the place Abraham stopped for the first time in Canaan, where he made his first altar, and where God spoke His blessing over Abram (Gen 12:7). Shechem is the place Jacob made his first altar to God, but heartache followed Jacob’s declaration. Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, was raped by Shechem, son of Hamor, and Dinah’s brothers avenged her by killing all the men in the town (Gen 34:25). Jacob surrendered to God again by burying his idols at Shechem (Gen 35:2).

It was at Shechem that Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen 37:12). Joshua’s covenant renewal ceremony (Josh 8:30-35), final words spoken over Israel, and the final covenant renewal ceremony happened there. The scripture says, “Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord” (Josh 24:26). Joseph’s bones were carried and buried in Shechem after Joshua’s death to fulfill the promise made to Joseph (Josh 24:32). Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Joshua declared that same place holy through their own journey, surrender, heartache, and experience with God, and it remains sacred today.

Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well in Shechem. Jesus seems to discount the location when He speaks to the woman. Jesus said, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming

²³ Barry, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, “City of Shechem.”

when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem” (John 4:21). Looking at this passage, D.A. Carson states, “First, he announces the impending obsolescence of both the Jerusalem temple and the Mount Gerizim site as definitive places of worship.”²⁴ This study seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is not proclaiming locations as irrelevant, but he is announcing the coming end of God being limited to one location among the people.

In this location, Shechem, Jesus announces for the first time in public that He is the Messiah (John 4:26). Jesus chooses the same location where Abram made his first altar, where Jacob declared God as his God and buried his idols, where Joshua performed the covenant renewal curses on Mount Ebal and blessings on Mount Gerizim, where Joseph’s bones were brought back and laid to rest, where Joshua gave his final words to Israel, and where Jesus is to announce publicly for the first time that He is the Messiah.

Michael Baum states, “This well stands not only in Shechem (Samaria) but also in the virtual shadow of Mt. Gerizim, where Jews had destroyed the Samaritan temple less than two centuries before.”²⁵ Jesus appears in a place Jews deemed unholy and spoke to a woman Jews would consider as unclean. Jesus prophesied to the Samaritan woman at the well and healed the shame she carried and forgave her sins. The place where Jesus spoke to the woman is the same area where Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, was raped by a man named Shechem (Gen 34:1-31). The very name Shechem is a reminder of the trauma from the past.

Jesus takes away the shame of a marginalized woman with hints of redeeming the defilement of Dinah by choosing to announce for the first time He is the Messiah to an unlikely

²⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 222

²⁵ Michael Baum, “Echoes of Samaria,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 28, no. 2 (March 2015): 38.

woman in an unlikely place. In the place of rejection and trauma, Jesus brings His spirit and truth through redeeming a person and a place. Even though the woman did not say it, she experienced the same feeling that Jacob had at Bethel when he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place and I wasn’t aware of it” (Gen 28:16).

Bethel – Jacob declares a place “The House of God.” Jacob leaves Shechem and travels back to Bethel. Bethel is the place where Jacob had previously dreamed of stairs going from earth to heaven where angels were ascending and descending. God gave Jacob a blessing in the dream that he would have a mighty inheritance, that all the people on earth would be blessed through Jacob, and that God is with him (Gen 28:13-15). Jacob awakes and says in Genesis 28:16, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” He named the place Bethel, which means “house of God” (Gen 28:19).

Jacob returned to Bethel where God appeared again and blessed him in the same place. He received more blessings that his name is to be changed to Israel, that kings will descend from him, that he will inherit the land promised to his family, and then God went up from the place where he spoke to Jacob (Gen 35:11-13). Both of Jacob’s encounters with God in Bethel follow the same patterns. Both times, Jacob experiences God’s presence; in both places, Jacob proclaims a specific geographical place as “the house of God,” receives a blessing of increase, and both cause Jacob to look up towards heaven.

In each of Jacob’s encounters with God, the sacred place was established by God’s presence. The existence of the holy location was established when Jacob identified the place as

holy. Jacob named Peniel and Bethel and declares God as the only God out of gratitude for experiencing God's presence. After experiencing the presence of God, Jacob enhanced each place by either honoring the place with a new name or making an altar to God.

As Jacob walked away from the existence and enhancement of each holy location, he walked into the expansion of God's blessings spoken over him. The blessing was the expansion of Jacob's territory, his descendants, a new name, and favor with God. A sacred location does not necessarily mean that the location always remains holy after the holy event takes place. These three locations have had moments in history where they have been sacred and forgotten. However, these locations remain holy places today that serve as a reminder of God's sovereignty in Jacob's life and the lives of believers.

Jordan River – Place of crossing over. The Jordan River is a significant place in the history of Israel and a holy place today. Joshua led the children of Israel over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The night before they crossed, they camped beside the river's edge. That night, Joshua told the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you" (Josh 3:5). The next day the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant and stood in the middle of the Jordan River. The river stopped flowing, and they crossed over on the dry ground.

Joshua gave the orders to take twelve stones from the Jordan River and construct a monument among the people. He also instructed them to take twelve stones and put them down in the Jordan River (Josh 4). David Howard states, "Surprisingly, the word the NIV renders as 'put them down' is literally 'cause them to rest.'"²⁶ There is a theme of rest within holy places

²⁶ David M. Howard, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 134.

God orchestrates. The monuments would remind the Israelites of when God stopped the Jordan River and allowed the Israelites to cross on dry ground. The Jordan River is a holy place where the Israelites engaged in cleansing preparation, a demonstration of God's power, the crossing over to God's promises, and an act of remembrance and rest.

The Jordan River is the place Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Matthew 3:13 states: "Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John." Jesus went to a specific holy place for a specific holy act. In the same river that Israel crossed over to the Promised Land, God declared Jesus as the Son of God. Moses had eagerly awaited forty years to deliver the Israelites into the Promised Land, and when Joshua led them across the Jordan River, they marked the place.

Robert Jamieson states, "All but thirty years had Jesus now spent in privacy at Nazareth, gradually ripening for His public work, and calmly awaiting the time appointed of the Father."²⁷ When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened up, and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:16-17). According to John Nolland, Matthew's account of the baptism event marks when Jesus took an active role in ministry, and His conversations with John and the devil establish the nature of Jesus' ministry to come.²⁸ The holy place will be a place of crossing over into what God has called the believer to become.

²⁷ Robert Jamieson, *Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 11

²⁸ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 151.

Promised Land – Place of promise. The Promised Land is a substantial part of the covenant given to Abraham and his descendants of Israel. Abram’s first word from God began with God saying, “go to the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1). God told Abram to go to a place where he will be blessed. So, Abram departed to Canaan, the Promised Land. Canaan resembled that of Eden, the land God’s people had lost.²⁹ The Promised land would “flow with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8; Num 13:27). The descendants of Abraham inherited the promise of the land through Isaac (Gen 26:3), Jacob (Gen 28:4; 35:12), Joseph (Gen 48:4), and Joseph’s brothers (Gen 46:1-4; 50:24).

The place was central to the promise and covenant of God to His people. The place was vital to the fulfillment of Israel’s dreams coming true. All the leaders of Israel’s history are concerned with the Promised Land covenant in one way or another. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* states, “The Promised Land is redirected from a geographical place to a covenant promise fulfilled in Christ. Jesus preaches about the new kingdom, *shalom*, the new Eden. The promise is no longer limited to dwelling in the physical land, as God now dwells among the believers.”³⁰ The gathering of believers is the place of promise.

Mount Sinai/Horeb– Place of calling. Mount Sinai is a place that is very significant in the history of Israel. Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb are the same place and are used interchangeably throughout Moses’ story. Moses encountered God’s presence on Mount Horeb for the first time. Mount Horeb is called “the mountain of God” and is where Moses saw the burning bush (Ex

²⁹ Nancy Persons, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), “Promised Land.”

³⁰ Persons, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, “Promised Land.”

3:1). Moses was tending his flock and saw a bush with flames, but that was not burning. He walked towards the place and God spoke to him. God said, “Moses! Moses! Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:4). Moses hid his face and took off his shoes in the place of meeting with God.

Moses showed reverence, surrender, and obedience to the voice of God in the place of God’s presence. Then God said: “Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So, I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land” (Ex 3:8). God spoke where they were in the present and of the place where they were going in the future. Alan Cole states, “God meets us initially where we are, at our recognized point of need, however shallow, and from this he leads us on to acknowledgment of needs at a deeper level.”³¹

Moses objected the first time, and God answers, “I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain” (Ex 3:12). God referenced coming back to the holy ground of Mount Sinai for His people to worship together as a nation. The purpose of the deliverance is for the nation of Israel to worship God together in one place.³² Moses fulfilled the words of God as they came back as a delivered people and set up camp at the base of Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1-2). Moses met with God on Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments.

Moses brought the commandments down from Sinai to the people and found them rebelling in the place that God had ordained as a place of worship. The Israelites camped at Sinai for over two months while Moses met with God, brought commandments from God, established

³¹ Robert Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (London, England: Tyndale, 1973), 73.

³² John D. Hannah, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 2004), 112.

laws for God, cried out to God to save his people, and worshipped God. The holy place of Mount Sinai is flawed because humans were involved. Moses continued to lead through his flaws and the flaws of his people in the sacred place.

Bethlehem – People came to see Jesus at a place. The first location people came to see Jesus was Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 prophesied that Bethlehem would be the place of Jesus' birth 700 years before it happened. Luke 2:8-11 gives the account of heavenly angels telling shepherds the place they could find Jesus. The parallel between King David and the Bethlehem shepherds can be seen in that these shepherds are performing the same task and in the same place where King David was a shepherd boy. Luke 2:12 states, "And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

The angels sent the shepherds to a specific place to experience Jesus in specific circumstances. The shepherds provide a pattern in how the believer can hear from God, obey God's commands, and experience Him. The commissioning of the angels led to the shepherds hurrying to the place. After they experienced seeing Jesus, they told others and rejoiced and praised God for all they had seen and heard at the place (Luke 2:17-20). Experiencing Jesus in the sacred place results in a divine identity and in a new commissioning, that of telling others about Jesus, and worshipping Him.

Mount of Olives – Place of commission. The Mount of Olives is a significant place in the life of Jesus. Jesus' triumphal entry, retreat to prayer, betrayal and arrest, ascension to heaven, and

return all happen on the Mount of Olives. The mountain is east of ancient Jerusalem and the Garden of Gethsemane is at its base. The triumphal entry is accounted for in all four gospels. Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives as people laid their coats and branches on the road and shouted, “Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God in the highest heaven” (Matt 21:9). Worshipping Jesus makes the moment holy.

The Pharisees then questioned Jesus, who wanted the people to be silent. Trent Butler, in the *Holman New Testament Commentary*, states, “Impossible, replied Jesus. This is the moment God ordained for me to receive praise. If human voices were silent, nature would shout its praise.”³³ Jesus speaks to the rocks commanding their obedience. The Pharisees represent the continued dilemma of people rejecting Jesus in a holy place and how some will always reject the Son of God.³⁴

The Garden of Gethsemane (located on the Mount of Olives) is where Jesus prayed the night before He was crucified. Jesus retreated to His familiar place of prayer (Luke 22:39). Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to gather with Him at this place. Jesus praying to the Father is a foreshadowing of Jesus interceding for humanity at the father’s right hand. Jesus prayed a prayer of anguish, surrender, and acceptance of God’s will (Matt 26:36-42). He prayed, “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine” (Matt 26:39). Jacob wrestled with God in the holy place, and God blessed him. Moses doubted his own speech by arguing with God on holy ground, and God gave him Aaron as his

³³ Trent C. Butler, *Luke: Holman New Testament Commentary*, vol. 3 (Nashville, TN, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 319.

³⁴ Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 481.

voice. Jesus questioned God's plan through surrender, but God did not change His mind. The Garden of Gethsemane is a familiar place of prayer to ask for God's will.

Because Jesus was in a familiar place, Judas knew where to find Jesus to betray Him to the Romans.³⁵ In this familiar place, Jesus was betrayed by a familiar face. Jesus was forced to leave the holy place to begin His time of suffering. In the same place 1,000 years before, David was betrayed by his son Absalom and forced to leave the holy city to begin a season of exile. The Mount of Olives has been sacred from early scripture (2 Sam 15:30; Ezek 11:23). The Bible says, "David walked up the road to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and his feet were bare as a sign of mourning. And the people who were with him covered their heads and wept as they went. David reached the summit of the Mount of Olives where people worshiped God." (2 Sam 15:30, 32).

David wept on the Mount of Olives and lived in exile for ten years. Jesus perspired blood "as a physical accompaniment of Our Lord's agony"³⁶ on the Mount of Olives and was crucified the next day. David returned as the king of Israel, and Jesus returned as the resurrected king of the world. The Mount of Olives is a place of prayer, place of betrayal, and place of return. Jesus welcomed the betrayal in a familiar place and walked through suffering to conquer death, and he returned to the holy place as risen savior.

The Mount of Olives is the place of Jesus' ascension and prophesied as the place of his return (Luke 24:50; Zech 14:4-5). On the fortieth day after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus led the eleven disciples to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9; Luke 24:50; Matt 28:16), where he ascended into heaven and disappeared into the clouds. Angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus

³⁵ Stein, *The New American Commentary*, 558.

³⁶ Alexandrian Macalister, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 490.

had gone from that place but will return to that same place one day (Acts 1:11; Zech 14:4-5).

Howard L. Marshall states, “Parousia forms the background of hope against which the disciples are to act as the witnesses to Jesus.”³⁷ The Parousia is prophesied by Zechariah and taken as a literal interpretation that Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives.

Joyce Baldwin states, “The ascension of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and in particular, the promise of the angel concerning his return (Acts 1:11), draw attention to the significance of this prophecy and suggest a literal fulfillment.”³⁸ The Mount of Olives stands taller than the Temple Mount blocking any view from the east and was an inconveniently steep escape route from Jerusalem.³⁹ Jesus speaks of removing a mountain (Mark 11:23), and Zechariah writes of Jesus returning to the Mount of Olives by splitting the mountain in two, resulting in an escape route for God’s people (Zech 14:4-5). The Mount of Olives represents the place of petitioning God’s will, the place of surrender, the place of betrayal, the place of ascension, and the place of escape.

Mount Moriah – Place of provision. Mount Moriah is a significant place in the history, present day, and future of believers. Mount Moriah is the place where Abraham offered Isaac to the Lord (Gen 22:2), David made an altar to God (2 Sam 24:18-25), and Solomon built the Temple to God (2 Ch 3:1). Mount Moriah has endured centuries of contention, with the nation of Israel going

³⁷ Howard I. Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1980), 66.

³⁸ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1972), 217.

³⁹ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, 217.

back and forth in gaining and losing its ownership.⁴⁰ God led Abraham to a specific place on Mount Moriah. God said to Abram, “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah” (Gen 22:2). God said to take the son you love and go to a specific place.

God’s call to Abram involved being willing to sacrifice his only son, and God specifies the land of Moriah as the place for sacrifice.⁴¹ The altar would be Abram’s fifth altar and his last one in Canaan.⁴² God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and provided a ram. David obeyed God and made an altar to end the plague on his people (2 Sam 24:18-25). Solomon constructed the Temple to God to be the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. Mount Moriah is a storied place in the history of the patriarchs and kings of Israel. Mount Moriah is a significant place in the history, present day, and future of God’s kingdom.

Ezekiel prophesied of Jesus returning to enter through the Eastern Gate, the same location as Mount Moriah (Eze 44:1-3). The prophecy says that the gate will be shut. Crusaders walled up the gate over one thousand years ago. Their reasoning was that, because Jesus entered through the gate on Palm Sunday, it should be shut until His return.⁴³ Zechariah 14:4-5 serves as further reason to believe Jesus will return through the Eastern Gate to judge the world. Cooper states that “Today the Eastern Gate, also called the Golden Gate, is a significant holy site for three

⁴⁰ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Third Millennium Press LT, 1997), “Gen 22:11-14.”

⁴¹ Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), 221.

⁴² Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, 221.

⁴³ Lamar Eugene Cooper, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 388.

major world religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jews believe that when the Messiah comes, he will open the east gate and enter the Temple Mount first.”⁴⁴

All three of the Abrahamic faiths regard Mount Moriah as the same location as the Temple Mount. Mount Moriah reveals a location that God has ordained in the past, present, and future. Mount Moriah serves as a physical reminder that God’s providence surpasses human imperfections to ordain a place that is holy because of what has happened, what takes place today, and what is to come.

Heaven – Place of eternity. God will create a new heaven and a new earth “and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind... For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me... so shall your descendants and your name remain” (Is 65:17; 66:22). God continues the pattern of creating a place to exist, enhance, and expand the Kingdom of God through the new heaven prophecies. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, in *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, states, “The world renewal taught in Scripture regards the event as supernatural and as taking place in a different and higher sphere.”⁴⁵

The book of Revelation reveals the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth where God will dwell eternally with His people (Rev 21:2). The geographical divide between heaven and earth begins to lose its significance. The new heaven and the new earth will be the new Jerusalem and “will be a place of perfect righteousness (Is 51:6), divine kindness (Is 54:10),

⁴⁴ Cooper, *The New American Commentary*, 388.

⁴⁵ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1545.

an eternal relationship to God (Is 66:22), total freedom from sin (Rom 8:21),” and it will happen in an ordained place created and renewed by God.⁴⁶ The place remains relevant for the future of God’s people.

The theme of God creating new things is throughout the scriptures. God enjoys redeeming the old and creating the new. Redemption language is found throughout the Bible. “Many key theological expressions incorporate the idea: new creation (2 Cor 5:17), the new birth (Jn 3:3), new man (Eph 2:15; Col 3:10), new commandment (Jn 13:34), new covenant (Jer 31:31), new life (Rom 6:4), and various others.”⁴⁷ The new heavens and new earth residing in the new Jerusalem incorporate the former things but follow the pattern of God redeeming all things. The nature of God is to make things new and perfect, but God works through imperfect humanity.

The earth is God’s and everything in it, so the earth is holy. Yet, the earth is fallen through the sins of humanity where God sent His son Jesus to redeem it and make all things new. Believers can follow the pattern that God has given through redeeming places to honor God. Every place was made to glorify God in the original orchestration of creation. When a group of believers dedicates a place to God, they are redeeming the ground that was originally created to exalt God. Humanity’s offerings to God are imperfect, flawed, and fall short of what God deserves. However, anything and any place that is dedicated to God can be redeemed, made new, holy, sacred, and set apart by the blood of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁶ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1547.

⁴⁷ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1543.

Sacred facilities

Noah's Ark. Throughout the Bible, there are sacred places that exist to experience the presence of God, redemption from sin, growth in relationship with God, and fellowship with other believers. This section will explore a few sacred places created for God.

Noah's Ark is the first facility that God commanded a human to build and can be seen as a life raft of deliverance. In the days of Noah, men's hearts grew wicked and all they thought about was evil. Genesis 6:6 states, "So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on earth." One of God's regrets was that he placed sinful people in His holy created place. So, God instructed Noah to build an ark among the sinful people to save Noah and his family.

"Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God" (Gen 6:9). God asks humanity for the first time in scripture to build something that would result in saving people's lives. The ark saved the animals and Noah's family from the devastating flood that wiped out the entire earth. After the flood, God said, "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, it is the sign of my covenant with you and all the earth" (Gen 9:13). God made a promise to the created people and the created place that they will be preserved.

Hubert Damisch provides a unique view of architecture and the perception of buildings in *Noah's Ark: Essays on Architecture*. He says that, "When Solomon undertook to build the Temple of Jerusalem, it is said that he called on Egyptian artists but that it was God himself who taught him (Noah) the precepts of good architecture."⁴⁸ The thought of Noah taking on such a massive project that had never been accomplished, never been talked about, and had no point of reference reveals the miracle and how much God must have been involved.

⁴⁸ Hubert Damisch, *Noah's Ark: Essays on Architecture*, ed. Anthony Vidler, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 5.

The divine direction of God in architecture could be the main reference point for the symmetry and understanding of how architecture has been accepted throughout the ages. The agreed-upon rules of architecture that humanity has grown to accept depend on an innate sense of symmetry and reliability to achieve the best design. The breakthroughs in architecture, design, innovation, and style that God revealed in building the ark were probably passed down from Noah's family.

The ark is the first refuge for God's people. The ark is sacred and holy because of the life it preserved through the protection of the structure. The sacred aspect of the ark is that only God could have designed the blueprint and details of accommodating all of creation. Humanity easily doubts and limits the abilities of what is possible. Only a word from God could detail the plans of an ark and inspire humans to attempt such a daunting task. A project that a family could agree on and continue for over one hundred years is a miracle. God gave direction, purpose, and inspiration allowing them to finish the project. Doubting the story is easy, but spending time figuring out the possibilities leads to faith.

For Damisch, "God alone was able to take the proper measure of things. Indeed, he himself had ordered and programmed a universal and devastating catastrophe, though one that contained a safety clause, for it was to be a prelude to the regeneration of humans."⁴⁹ The regeneration of the human race was a foreshadowing of salvation. Jesus provided a life raft for humanity to keep them from sinking into sin the same way the ark preserved humanity from extinction. The ark was a place ordained by God for the salvation of God's people.

⁴⁹ Damisch, *Noah's Ark: Essays on Architecture*, 17.

Tabernacle. The Tabernacle is the first place instructed by God to house the very presence of God. God's people were in bondage in Egypt and in need of deliverance. God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites, but then they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. While in the wilderness, God said to Moses, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this Tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you" (Exod 25:8-9). Here is the first reference to "sanctuary" in the context of God dwelling among the people.

This verse also communicates that God's people are preparing a place for God's presence and community. The preparation of the environment, place, space, practice, and spirit of worship is all built into the functionality of the Tabernacle. This research will not go into every detail of what resides in the Tabernacle; however, the intended goal of the Tabernacle review is to reveal the importance of how the Christian prepares places to worship God. The Tabernacle is the best place to begin the understanding of a church facility among God's people and amid the local community.

The Tabernacle is the first established dwelling place of God's presence. Matthew Henry states, "There were altars and groves used for religious worship before this, yet there was never any house, or temple, built for sacred uses in any nation before this Tabernacle was built by Moses. And that all heathen temples afterward were patterned by it."⁵⁰ This monumental moment marks the first designated space of worship in any religion.

All other idolatrous religions would be counterfeit to the original Tabernacle design. The Tabernacle established the first dwelling place of God among the people. The Lord coming down

⁵⁰ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary Volume 1 - Genesis to Deuteronomy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell and Company, 1967), 381.

to dwell with His people reveals a sacred location in the redemption story. God said, “Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them. You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I show you” (Exod 25:8-9).

Mark K. George provides great research on the Tabernacle and the roles it played throughout the Old Testament. Nearly one-third of the book of Exodus consists of the Tabernacle narratives. George states, “The Tabernacle narratives are unlike any other building text in the Hebrew Bible, because they are both longer and more detailed than them. These narratives consist of 13 chapters, in two blocks of text in the second half of the book of Exodus (Ex 25-40).”⁵¹ The instructions for constructing Solomon’s Temple are only three chapters, and the second Temple construction narrative is only six chapters.

George goes on to say, “It is rather paradoxical that a space with no physical permanence – no foundation, mere curtains for walls, poles to carry certain tabernacle objects – obtained more permanence in the literary traditions of Israel than either temple.”⁵² God detailed every physical attribute and functionality of the tabernacle. In a dwelling made to worship God, there must be total surrender to God’s direction and guidance. The Tabernacle is a place that is sacred, holy, and set apart to enhance people’s relationship with God and others.

Temple. Solomon’s Temple is a sacred edifice and the first building that was erected to worship the God of Israel. Before his death, David provided all the materials for the construction of the Temple on the summit of Mount Moriah and “on the east of the city, on the spot where Abraham

⁵¹ Mark K. George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 1.

⁵² George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space*, 1.

had offered Isaac” (Gen 22:1-14).⁵³ The terms in the Bible that describe the Temple Mount are relevant to the study of holy, sacred, and set-apart facilities.

It is called “the temple” (1 Kings 6:17); “thy holy temple” (Ps 79:1); “the house of the Lord” (2 Chr 23:5, 12); “the house of the God of Jacob” (Isa 2:3); “the house of my glory” (Isa 60:7); a “house of prayer” (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13); “a house of sacrifice” (2 Chr. 7:12); “the house of their sanctuary” (2 Chr 36:17); “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isa. 2:2); “our holy and our beautiful house” (64:11); “the holy mount” (27:13); “the palace for the Lord God” (1 Chr. 29:1); “the tabernacle of witness” (2 Chr. 24:6); “Zion” (Ps. 74:2; 84:7). Christ calls it “my Father’s house” (John 2:16).⁵⁴

The Temple is the holy, sacred dwelling place of God’s presence and the house of the Lord. Easton states, “Believers are called ‘the temple of God’ (1 Cor 3:16, 17). The Church is designated ‘a holy temple in the Lord’ (Eph 2:21). Heaven is also called a temple (Rev 7:5).”⁵⁵ Solomon’s Temple in the past, the gathering of believers in a specific place in the present, and the new temple of heaven reveal the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a facility dedicated to God.

The dwelling place of God’s presence resided in the Tabernacle until Solomon’s Temple was constructed in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. The Bible declares, “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord” (1 Kings 6:1). The following chapters in 1 Kings recount the details of Solomon’s Temple and how it was

⁵³ M.G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary; and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 657.

⁵⁴ Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 657.

⁵⁵ Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 657.

constructed in great splendor and majesty. In his book *From Temple to Meeting House*, Harold W. Turner covers the history of the church facility. He states:

Solomon's general plan was that of a long narrow structure commencing with an impressive entrance porch in the shape of a broad room, followed by the 'holy place', a nave with the shape of a long room, and then the square 'Holy of Holies'. This three-chambered building faced the east, and outside its portals stood two large freestanding pillars.⁵⁶

Solomon created a temple unlike anything the world had ever seen before. The three chambers in the Temple building replicated the three circles in the Tabernacle tent. The order and the reverence always exalted God and gathered people. The Temple served as God's home for approximately 400 years, and then it was destroyed in 586 BC. The second Temple was built in 520 BC and extensively renovated by Herod in 19 BC.⁵⁷ God's divine detail has kept Solomon's Temple relevant all throughout history, and it is still the location of one of the most coveted places on earth for Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

The pattern of the Temple Mount's existence, enhancement, expansion, and destruction has never stopped since Solomon's first construction. Haggai 2:9 prophesies that "The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. And in this place, I will bring peace. I, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have spoken." Haggai's prophecy was pronounced in 520 BC, and the second temple's completion happened in 515

⁵⁶ Harold Walter Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter Inc., 1979), 51.

⁵⁷ Ron Geaves, *Continuum Glossary of Religious Terms* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2002), 54.

BC.⁵⁸ There is nothing that describes the physical appearance of the temple; however, scripture points to the second temple being inferior to the first.

Haggai 2:3 asks, “Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all.” Even though the structure appears to be inferior to the former years, the glory is greater. The enhancement that the second temple experienced resulted in peace that lasted for over 500 years. The first temple lasted only 400 years. The Temple is greater in its future glory because of the grandeur of Jesus’ first advent and immanent second advent.⁵⁹ The glory will not depend on whether the building is grand but will depend on the presence of Jesus visiting the gathering. The glory of Haggai’s prophecy is that Jesus was presented in the temple as a child and Jesus will reign in the New Jerusalem.

When Jesus was presented in the temple as a child by Mary and Joseph, the glory of that day was greater than anything that the facility had ever experienced (Luke 2:22). At the same time, a man named Simeon was led by the Spirit to the Temple. As Jesus was being presented to God in a specific place, the Spirit led Simeon to that same place. Simeon had a promise from God that he would see the Messiah before he died. That day he found Jesus in the Temple.

He held Jesus in his arms and experienced worship, peace, salvation, light, glory, and the gift of prophecy (Luke 2:25-35). Simeon met Jesus and was forever at peace. Following the spirit to the place of Jesus will result in peace.⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit led Simeon to a location where he had

⁵⁸ P.R. Bedford, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 802.

⁵⁹ Richard A. Taylor, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 168.

⁶⁰ John D. Barry and Benjamin Espinoza, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), “Baptism.”

a life-changing encounter with Jesus. The Holy Spirit leads believers into moments to experience the goodness of God in the place of the gathering.

When Jesus was twelve years old, he and his family attended the Passover celebration. Mary and Joseph came back home, but Jesus did not. They went back to Jerusalem looking for Jesus and found Him three days later in the Temple among the religious leaders (Luke 2:41-46). Mary said, “Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you” (Luke 2:28). Jesus responds, “But why did you need to search? Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). Leon Morris states, “This was a customary place for teaching and evidently there was no problem in an unknown boy attaching himself to the circle. He was *listening to them and asking them questions*, which indicates a thirst for knowledge.”⁶¹

Jesus is perplexed that they would question where he was. The geography of where to find Jesus and the spiritual place of learning was in the courts of God, among people that knew God’s words. Jesus provides His first words in the gospel of Luke within the Temple. If one is looking for Jesus, there does not need to be a complicated process. Look for people who know God’s word and the locations where people gather to worship God, and one will find Jesus.

In the gospel of John, the Pharisees caught a woman in the act of adultery and brought her to Jesus while He was in the Temple (John 8:1-11). The beginning of this account says, “but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple” (John 8:1). Luke says, “The crowds gathered at the Temple early each morning to hear him” (Luke 21:38). The outer court served as a teaching location within the Temple for scribes to gather their students to expound on the

⁶¹ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 108.

law.⁶² The Pharisees entered the Temple where Jesus was situated, threw the woman down, and accused her of adultery.

The Pharisees asked Jesus what to do with the woman in an attempt to trap Him in front of the crowd (John 8:6-7). Jesus responded by saying, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone” (John 8:7), and her accusers fled. Jesus saves the woman from her accusers and forgave her in the Temple amid the gathering (John 8:7-11). The Temple facility was the place where the Holy of Holies resided, the place Haggai prophesied the coming glory on the Temple Mount, and the place where Jesus reveals Himself through understanding, worship, and forgiveness.

Upper Room – Acts 2 – The Holy Spirit came to the gathering place. The Upper Room was a place where many significant events in the Christian faith took place. The journey of this room through scriptures reveals also the purpose of the church building today. In the Upper Room, Jesus taught the disciples (John 14:1-4), Jesus fellowshiped with the disciples, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13), Jesus blessed the Last Supper (Matt 26:26-29), resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples in their fear (Luke 24:36-37), Matthias was chosen to be an Apostle (Acts 1:23), and the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Nelson Estrada states that “The commission to be witnesses in Acts 1:8 together with Jesus’ departure in Acts 1:9-11, mark the beginnings of the apostles’ transformation from followers to leaders.”⁶³ The Upper

⁶² D.A Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1991), “Luke 21:38.”

⁶³ Nelson P. Estrada, *From Followers to Leaders: The Apostles in the Ritual Status Transformation in Acts 1-2* (London, EN: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 1.

Room reveals the journey of the disciples learning how to follow Jesus and stepping into leadership.

The Upper Room is a significant place that served as a meeting room for Jesus' closest friends and disciples. John Yarid's study on the Upper Room states, "Tracing the themes of the Upper Room Discourse throughout 1 John is similar to admiring the many facets of a sparkling diamond. Each time one comes back for an additional glance there is more beauty and intricacy to discover."⁶⁴ The Upper Room is a prime example of how the church building should function around the teaching of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Upper Room is called the "dining room" in some translations and served as a gathering place for Jesus and His disciples. Thomas Esposito provides great truth regarding the Last Supper and the importance of remembering what Christ sacrificed through communion. Esposito states, "Saint Paul rarely quotes Jesus directly in his letters, so when he explicitly cites Jesus' Last Supper words about bread and wine in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 he clearly wants his readers to be aware of the essential connection they have to their risen Lord."⁶⁵

Paul communicates the value and transcendent experience when a believer partakes of the eucharist. The eucharist is one of the most debated liturgical processes in Christianity, but the agreement comes around the gathering place. Jesus gathered the disciples in fellowship, love, truth, and grace. Church facilities that make gathering a core value cultivate fellowship, love, truth, and grace for the body of Christ.

⁶⁴ John R. Yard, Jr., "Reflections of the Upper Room Discourse in 1 John," 160, no. 637 (2003): 76.

⁶⁵ Thomas Esposito, *The Last Supper and the Lord's Supper: Paul and the Eucharist* (The Bible Today, 2019), 359.

Jesus was the leader in the Upper Room. There, Jesus models servant leadership when He washes the disciples' feet. The greatest leader must also be the greatest servant. In one moment, Jesus changes the perspective of the disciples' hierarchical leadership understanding of a leader. Jesus flips the roles to where the leader is the prime servant. Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell provide a powerful and practical study on servant leadership turning the "organizational pyramid" upside down.

When you turn the organizational pyramid upside down, rather than your people being responsive to you, they become responsibly able to respond and your job as the leader/manager is to be responsive to your people. This creates a very different environment for implementation. If you work for your people as servant leaders do, what is the purpose of being a manager? To help your people become eagles rather than ducks and soar above the crowd accomplishing goals, solving problems, and living the vision.⁶⁶ Jesus is the greatest leader to ever walk the earth. Jesus modeled the power of servant leadership in a sacred facility by washing the feet of those who loved Him. Churches are to be sacred places for operating as servant leader, just like Jesus.

Churches have the promise that Jesus is present every time two or more are gathered in His name (Matt 18:20). The disciples found themselves in the Upper Room after Jesus had been crucified and buried in a tomb. The Bible says, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'" The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19-20).

⁶⁶ Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, *Servant Leadership in Action: How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Incorporated, 2018), 21.

Jesus appeared in the Upper Room where the disciples were hiding in fear. The disciples' experiences in the Upper Room included the first communion, Jesus washing their feet for the first time, seeing the risen Savior for the first time, and their first encounter with the Holy Spirit. This room provides life-changing first-time experiences for the disciples. Facilities dedicated to God are to be spaces of new beginnings and new life in Christ.

Pentecost took place in the Upper Room where 120 followers of Jesus were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Many of the monumental experiences that the apostles would preach about took place in the Upper Room. The disciples had experiences of Jesus' knowledge and wisdom in the Upper Room, but they had not been given the power to carry out their own calling. As the disciples waited in the Upper Room, the Bible says:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4).

They were all together in one place. The Upper Room was the first place the Holy Spirit fell upon believers. A distinguishing characteristic of a sacred place is the manifestation of God's presence. The all-encompassing power of the Holy Spirit infiltrated every aspect of their lives. Pentecost was experienced together in a sacred, holy, and set-apart location. Pentecostal church facilities must teach and learn the word of God and experience God's presence. However, to accomplish God's purposes the body of Christ must be empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out what Jesus wants to accomplish through the church.

House churches. The Apostles gathered in houses to worship and teach the gospel to establish the early church. When discussing the early church, there are many problems that present themselves. There are limited sources, and there are the problems with nomenclature in specifically defining the movement, that of generalization, and the difficulty of the state of flux in the movement.⁶⁷ However, evidence points to the home residence as the location for early Church gatherings.⁶⁸ The book of Acts and Paul's letters affirm that house churches were vital gathering places for the early church.

House churches continued to be the norm until the fourth century when Constantine gave Christians the legal right to build places of worship.⁶⁹ The house church was not created by chance but by design. In *Architecture, Early Church*, Blue presents four main reasons the church met in homes for almost 300 years.

First, the "upper rooms" and domestic residences were immediately available. Second, the domestic structure provided a relatively inconspicuous meeting place. Christians used discretion in their choice of meeting place. Third, the Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora assembled in house synagogues. Many of the activities in the house church resembled those of the house synagogue. Fourth, the "house" provided the necessities of a Christian gathering, most importantly, the facilities needed for the preparation, serving and eating of the Lord's Supper.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Nigel G. Wright, "Themelios," *Restorationism and the 'House Church' Movement* 16, no. 2 (February 1991), 4.

⁶⁸ Bradley Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 91st ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 91.

⁶⁹ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 91.

⁷⁰ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 92.

The practical nature of home churches utilized accessibility, protection, Jewish tradition, and spiritual practices in establishing the house church as the main church facility model. The house church can be further understood through the lens of Paul the apostle.

House churches were intentionally chosen in select locations where the gospel could reach the most people. Derek Tidball's *Social Setting of Mission Churches* provides an in-depth view of Paul's missional mindset concerning the early church. Tidball states, "On entering a city Paul's mission strategy was to make contact with people by using the existing social networks to which he related. He made his way to the synagogue, or, in its absence, the place of prayer to meet other Jews."⁷¹ These locations served as evangelistic locations, teaching places, and places of prayer.

Tidball states, "In each location Paul sought to establish a household as the base of his missionary endeavors and as an ongoing means of support for himself and his newly formed Christian community."⁷² The households Paul established as church gathering places were not typical small homes. Rather, they were large homes with shops in the front, living space in the back, a place Paul could sell his tents to support his ministry, and a place Paul would have a platform from which to teach every day.⁷³ The home church was a community center that facilitated visitors, fellowship, commerce, the teaching of the word, worship, and settling of disputes.

The stages of the early home churches follow the pattern of the church facility's existence, enhancement, and expansion. Bradley Blue maps out three stages concerning house churches from 50 AD to 313 AD. During the first stage (50 AD – 150 AD), the early church met in private homes

⁷¹ Derek J. Tidball, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 884.

⁷² Tidball, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 884.

⁷³ Tidball, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 884.

and fits the term “house church” most accurately. These homes were architecturally unaltered spaces that served as central gathering locale for the church.⁷⁴ The establishment of the existence of the church facility emerged during the first stage. The second stage (150 AD – 250 AD) saw private residences renovated for the exclusive gathering of Christian communities.⁷⁵

Blue states, “These architectural alterations and change of function are the two characteristics of the so-called *domus ecclesiae*, appropriately rendered in English as ‘community center’ or ‘meeting house.’”⁷⁶ So, stage two enhanced the existing facility to better accommodate the house of meeting and church community. The final stage (250 AD – 313 AD) utilized larger buildings, halls, private facilities, and public facilities. The architectural discoveries of these halls and buildings do not resemble the Constantine Basilica style but are unique to the final stage of the house church era.⁷⁷ Stage three resulted in the expansion of the church facility for larger gatherings in larger spaces.

The archaeological findings in Dura-Europos, a town in Syria, provide a compelling history of the early church architecture and community.⁷⁸ The house church was estimated to have been constructed (existed) in 232-33 AD and renovated (enhanced) into *domus ecclesiae* (community center) in 240-41 AD. The remains were excavated in 1932-1933 and are very well preserved.⁷⁹ The renovation reveals some major changes that took place during these renovations: A wall was

⁷⁴ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 92.

⁷⁵ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 92.

⁷⁶ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 92.

⁷⁷ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 92.

⁷⁸ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 94.

⁷⁹ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 94.

removed to make way for a large gathering room, at the east end of the room there was a platform most likely for teaching, a room was transformed into a baptistry, a canopy was built, walls were decorated with paintings, and the courtyard had new flooring and seating.⁸⁰

The construction of a private home that was offered by the owner began the existence of this particular house church. Ten years later, the home was enhanced to expand rooms and courtyards so more people could experience the teaching, baptism, fellowship, and community life of the church. The early church followed the pattern of enhancing its facilities to accommodate the expanding community of Christ.

Sacred altars

Many of the Hebrew patriarchs made altars to God in the locations they experienced God's presence, goodness, victory, and forgiveness. An Israelite altar is a platform where offerings and sacrifices are made to God in holy places. Some of the key figures throughout the Bible that are recorded building altars include Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 12), Isaac (Gen 26:25), Jacob (Gen 33:20; Gen 35:1-7), Moses (Ex 17:15; Ex 24:4), Joshua (Josh 8:30-31), Gideon (Judg 6:26-27), Samuel (1 Sam 7:17), Saul (1 Sam 114:35), David (2 Sam 24:18; 1 Chr 21:18-26), Solomon (1 Kg 6:20-21), Elijah (1 Kg 18:30), and Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2-3).

Noah builds the first altar recorded in the Bible. After God spared Noah and his family, it was time for all the animals to be released upon the earth. The first thing Noah does in the location of his salvation is to make an altar to God (Gen 8:20). The burnt sacrifice was an

⁸⁰ Blue, *Architecture, Early Church*, 94.

atonement for sins with everything burning to ashes and the smoke going upward to heaven as an offering.⁸¹

Before Israel began this practice, Noah's first thoughts after walking upon the new earth were Godward. Derek Kidner states that, "Homage, dedication, and atonement are all expressed in the *burnt offerings*: the new earth is to be God's if he will have it."⁸² Noah was dedicating the earth to God and the Lord was pleased. Then, God responded to the altar by making a promise to never destroy the earth again (Gen 8:21). An offering of gratitude in the place of salvation pleased the Lord.

Noah was overwhelmed by the goodness of God saving his family and sparing the earth. In the location he walked the earth for the first time after over three hundred days, he built something out of gratitude for God. Noah worshiped God by building an altar to celebrate God's goodness and mercy. Many of the patriarchs of the Israelite faith made altars out of gratitude and obedience to God. Abraham built an altar after receiving the promises of God (Gen 12:7). God commanded Jacob to build an altar at Bethel where he had appeared to him before (Gen 35:1-7).

John Calvin observed that, "God chooses and assigns Bethel, rather than any other place, for his [Jacob's] sanctuary; because the very sight of it would greatly avail to take away terror when he would remember that there the glory of the Lord had been seen by him."⁸³ Jacob revisited the familiar place of Bethel to build an altar. Building something out of worship to God

⁸¹ K. A. Matthews, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 392.

⁸² Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 100.

⁸³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1578/1948), 233.

in the place God appeared in the past produced faith in Jacob that God would come through again. Revisiting the place where God has provided in the past, through offering and worship, gives faith that God will come through in the future.

The altar is dependent on the value of the sacrifice. David reveals an expectation to give God the best. Israel fell into judgment because David disobeyed God by taking a census. God sent a plague upon the people, and 70,000 people died in three days. The angel prepared to destroy Israel, but God stopped him. The angel's place where he stopped was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam 24:14-16). There, where the angel stopped, the place of mercy, God commanded David to build an altar. Araunah offered to give the threshing floor, oxen, and wood for the sacrifice to King David (2 Sam 24:22). David replied to Araunah: "No, I insist on buying it, for I will not present burnt offerings to the LORD my God that have cost me nothing" (2 Sam 24:24).

The expectation of an altar that is built in obedience to God, gratitude for God's mercy, and worship, is that it must cost the altar maker something. Joyce G. Baldwin reveals that, "There is no suggestion that David underestimated the value of the threshing floor, which was to become the site of the temple."⁸⁴ David paid what was fair in the sight of the Lord. The place where the angel stopped from destroying Israel is the place David built an altar to God, the same place where Solomon built the first Temple, and where Jesus will return to rule. Offerings of thanksgiving must cost the believer something in order to build a spiritual altar before God that results in a legacy that outlives the altar maker.

⁸⁴ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 And 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary. Vol. 8. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 319.

The primary term in the Hebrew Bible for the “altar” is translated as a “slaughter place” where animals, birds, and grain were sacrificed in worship and atonement for sin in a sacred place.⁸⁵ Throughout the scriptures, the altars were made from mud, stone, or bronze on a high place.⁸⁶ According to Robert Haak, the “Altars were constructed at places which were considered to have a sacred character, points where contact between the human and the divine could occur.”⁸⁷ Moses received the Sinai altar instructions from God that established the altar sacrifices in the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple (Ex 20:22-26).

The Tabernacle and Temples had altars in them, but not all altars were within the Tabernacle or Temple. Some altars were built by themselves. Temples are covered and closed in, but altars are uncovered and open. Offering the best of the herd, the spotless lamb, and the pure dove foreshadowed Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice. Jesus was sacrificed as the spotless lamb of God, on an altar (the cross), on a high place (Golgotha), and for all the sins of the world once and for all. Believers can build an altar to God through worship, gratitude, confession, and forgiveness. The altar is not limited to the confines of the church, but it can be created wherever the believer surrenders to God because of the sacrifice Jesus made.

The evolution of the scriptural altar follows the pattern of existence, enhancement, and expansion. The first offering recorded in the Bible is that of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16). Many scholars teach that Cain’s offering was rejected because he only gave “some” of his grain and Abel’s offering was accepted because he gave the best of his flock.⁸⁸ Even though there is no

⁸⁵ Joel F. Drinkard, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publisher, 2003), 51.

⁸⁶ Drinkard, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 51.

⁸⁷ Robert D. Haak, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 162.

⁸⁸ Matthews, *The New American Commentary*, 267.

mention of making an altar, the altar concept is present in giving God the best. The introduction of the offering establishes the existence of sacrificing something to God. The second step of altars and the first mention of building an altar begins with Noah. An altar is made by Noah as he sacrifices the purest of the animals and birds to God through his offering of gratitude. God accepts his sacrifice.

The enhancement of the offering is the addition of building an altar in a sacred place. The third stage of the altar is Moses presenting the altar commands given to him by God on Mount Sinai. The expansion of understanding the commands and expectations of God provided clarity concerning the acceptable offerings for the Israelite people. The Mosaic covenant altar commandments were practiced in the Tabernacle, Temple, and Synagogues. Jesus was the final sacrifice of the Mosaic covenant and the bridge to the final expansion of the altar. Today, believers can make an altar by exalting the name of Jesus through worship and giving their best.

The research concerning places, facilities, and altars is founded on the theology that all of God's creation is holy and redeemable. Believers have been called to steward the place that God has given. God created the earth and everything in it is holy. The church cannot be silenced by persecution, but God always makes a way for people to gather. Biblical theology reveals imperfect people interacting with a perfect God.

The perfection of God's locational plans for humanity has been messy in every place. However, through the imperfections of these places, facilities, and altars, God's providence has used every story in the masterpiece of His redemption. The sacred place is the place of gathering in the name of Jesus. In the moment of the gathering, the place is redeemed as significant in the journey of the believer. When the believer encounters the presence of God, there must be a

redeemed place of gratitude and surrender to God physically and spiritually. The redeemed gathering of believers results in the existence of God's presence.

Literature Review

The theology of why a church facility is important reveals places that are sacred, set apart, and holy. In the Bible, sites that were designated to worship God were sacred. When Jesus conquered death, the Temple is relocated to dwell in Jesus and within the followers of Christ (John 2:21; 1 Cor 6:19). A Christian is not limited to accessing Jesus based on a location, but believers can bring Jesus wherever they go. Believers must steward the facilities of the church as sacred because the gathering is sacred. Adam was called on to steward what God had given before and after the fall. God has called the Christian to steward the church.

The facilities that are dedicated to God are sacred, holy, and set apart to exalt Jesus. The worship of facilities is never the focus, but the holy act of preparing a place to gather in the name of Jesus should be sacred to the believer. This section will explore Christ's mission as the only mission of church facilities, the incarnation theology of the gathering, God-honoring people's attempts to honor Him, the gathering redeeming God's holy creation, issues from related contemporary literature, the existence and enhancement of church facilities, and defining the expansion of the church.

Christ's mission is the only mission for church facilities

Establishing the existence of holy places past, present, and future combats the argument that locations do not matter to God. Church mission is defined as the mission of Christ to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). The church model found in the book of Acts is the foundation of a limitless ability to gather in any location and experience Jesus. The book of Acts reveals patterns and consistent meeting locations in homes, temples, synagogues, and other places throughout the community.

The foundation of the modern-day, mission-oriented church is that Christ cannot be limited to any place, person, or pattern; however, by providing a centralized place with designated people and pre-set patterns of worship, we are certainly not limiting Christ, are we? The human imperfections involved in God's perfect plans consistently present issues. Most every holy location throughout scripture involved great moments with God, but monumental human failures as well. The risk of limiting God will always be present because of the human element. However, the mission of the church is not to seek perfection but to walk in full surrender to Christ's mission. Our life is not our own because our mission is not our own. The mission of church facilities is the mission of Christ that is connected to the body of Christ.

The local mission perspective throughout this research will be Pentecostal in nature. Pneumatologically approaching the scriptures through contemporary studies reveals a Pentecostal church facilities theology. The church's facility mission incorporates the triune nature. Amos Yong writes, "God reveals himself as one who invites relationship with others. Christian mission is also proclaiming and manifesting such a God-desiring friendship with

humanity. Christ becomes the model of interpersonal relationality, mediating between the triune God and humankind.”⁸⁹

Christ’s mission is the church’s mission within the Triune nature of God. Exalting Jesus is an expression that is defined as the Triune nature manifested in the gathering of the body of Christ. Exalting Jesus is the fundamental purpose that allows the mission of the church to maximize ministry effectiveness. Simon Chan states that, “Just as Jesus’ life is the story of God and His love, the church’s life is Jesus’ story of God’s purpose for the world. Only as the church tells and embodies the whole story of Christ—His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return—can it be said to be proclaiming the ‘full gospel.’”⁹⁰ Pentecostal church facility’s mission must communicate the full gospel message. The all-encompassing mission of Jesus is the only mission church facilities should possess.

Jackson Wu defines the gospel in a way that is relevant to the Pentecostal perspective in his work *One Gospel For All Nations*. Wu says that “It is important to understand that ‘all theology is contextualized theology.’ We all interpret the Bible from a cultural perspective.”⁹¹ The danger of interpreting the Bible through one’s own cultural perspective is to miss the nonnegotiable mission of Christ. Wu further says, “Biblical writers consistently answer four key questions when presenting the gospel: ‘Who is Jesus?’ ‘What does He do?’ ‘Why does He matter?’ and ‘How should we respond?’ These questions are not random... should shape the way we preach the gospel today.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Amos Yong, *The Missiological Spirit: Christian Theology of Mission in the Third Millennium Global Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 215.

⁹⁰ Chris E.W. Green, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 46.

⁹¹ Jackson Wu, *One Gospel For All Nations* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), xxii.

⁹² Wu, *One Gospel For All Nations*, xxiv.

These questions must be asked by the Pentecostal church leaders consistently to stay in a posture of Christ-centered missional praxis. By following this pattern, there is a clear contextualization model that results in following Christ's mission. Wu reveals that contextualization concerns the relationship between the biblical text and cultural context. The exegetical and cultural dynamics must always align with Christ's mission and the facility mission of the church.

Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola's work *Jesus: A Theography*, presents a compelling revelation that the scriptures from beginning to end are all about Jesus. Sweet and Viola say, "Virtually every biography of Jesus begins with the nativity account in Bethlehem. The Jesus theography you hold in your hand begins the story of Jesus at 'the beginning.'"⁹³ Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul referred to the Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled by Christ throughout their writings.

Sweet and Viola state, "In Jesus the promise is confirmed, the covenant is renewed, the prophecies are fulfilled, the law is vindicated, salvation is brought near, sacred history has reached its climax, the perfect sacrifice has been offered and accepted... the Son of Man has accomplished divine purpose."⁹⁴ They argue that the entire Bible should be seen as the red letter Bible with all the words considered as Jesus' because the entire book is about Jesus. The all-encompassing acceptance that everything is surrendered to Jesus creates a Christ-centered mission. The mission of the church must always be focused and limited to Christ's mission in facilities, organization, teaching, generosity, and worship. The church's facility mission can only be the mission of Christ.

⁹³ Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2012), xi.

⁹⁴ Sweet and Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, xviii.

Incarnation theology

Incarnation theology lays the foundation for the necessity for church facilities. Incarnate means to make flesh. The Bible states, “And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (John 4:3). We live in a physical world. To separate the body from the spirit is a mistake. It was a physical body that became flesh and dwelt among us.

People come to Christ, and the church is the body of Christ. Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, and he was transformed. In the Gospels, people brought people to Jesus physically. Today, we bring people to the church, which facilitates the gathering of the body of Christ. Jesus was the body on earth and now the believers are the body of Christ on earth. Instead of Jesus’ physical body walking around, we build campuses so people can physically access the living Christ. The purpose of the facility is to be the living presence of Christ.

Why does the church build buildings at all? It is for the physical body. Just like Jesus had a physical body, there are physical bodies on earth. If someone wanted to see Jesus in His time, they would walk to where Jesus was physically teaching or dwelling, and they could see Him. We are made by God to have a place and to be put in a place. As stated previously, “Where two or more are gathered in my name I am there also” (Matt 18:20). The facility gives believers a place to gather, and Christ is present for people to approach. Everything the believer engages in is spiritual and physical. Jesus’ mission is the only mission that we are privileged to follow. The church facility plays a vital role in bringing the mission of Christ to the world.

Throughout the Christian faith, the sacraments are more than just tradition, but a place where heaven meets earth. Wolfgang Vondey and Chris Green write, “The surrealistic

component of the Pentecostal worldview contains an inherent openness to the reality of spirit(s) that both penetrates and transcends the human being-between-worlds, even in its sacramental dimension.”⁹⁵ Jesus uses the same incarnate language about communion and gathering in His name that results in His manifested presence (Luke 22:19, Matt 18:20).

Vondey and Green further write, “It will not do simply to assert that sacramental celebrations are important or that the sacraments are more than mere signs; we must practice them in order to go beyond the limitations of our dominant views of reality... Only in this way can we expect our eyes to be opened.”⁹⁶ Gathering together in the name of Christ results in Christ being in our midst and offers a place to practice the holy sacraments, making the gathering location a representation of the incarnate Christ.

The church building’s focus is never to be on its grandness, but on the awareness of God’s presence. Whenever an altar was built to worship God, it cost the person time, talent, and treasure. The Israelite altar was a place to repent to God, exalt God, worship God, and get close to God. One representation of the church facility is an altar to God. The church building is a collective altar built by a group of Christians with their time, talent, and treasure. A building without the awareness of God is powerless.

Jesus said, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (Matt 23:27-28). Without the awareness of God’s presence, there is no church mission or Christ among the gathering. However, the building that is dedicated

⁹⁵ Green, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader*, 231.

⁹⁶ Green, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader*, 232.

to the awareness of God's presence and built as an altar to exalt Jesus and love each other experiences the presence of Jesus.

Jesus is direct in condemning houses of worship that have no awareness of who He is. Jesus drove the merchants out of the Temple with passion (Matt 21:12). A building that is dedicated to God without an awareness of God is an abomination to God. However, a building dedicated to God with an awareness of God is a place where heaven meets earth through the incarnation of Christ. Like Jesus, the church must guard the sacred place of worship with the awareness of what distracts from exalting Jesus. Jesus drove out distractions physically in a gathering location that did not serve the mission of what God wanted to accomplish. Consistently driving out the distractions from church gathering locations will result in enhancing and expanding Christ's mission and presence in the church community.

God's presence blurs the lines between physical and spiritual realities. The concept of a "thin place" began with the Celtic pagan religions during the time of Christ but was later adopted by the converted Celtic Christian community.⁹⁷ According to Tracy Balzer, a "thin place" is "any environment that invites transformation in us... any place that creates a space and an atmosphere that inspires us to be honest before God and to listen to the deep murmurings of His Spirit within us."⁹⁸ Craig J. Sefa studied the Celtic Christians and discovered that, "Thin Places are places of Holy encounter between heaven and earth, between sacred and ordinary."⁹⁹ The thin places occur when heaven meets earth, and the line between heaven and earth is blurry. Acknowledging the thin places moves the believer closer to Jesus' words: "I am with you always" (Matt 28:20).

⁹⁷ Tracy Balzer, *Thin Places: An Evangelical Journey into Celtic Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2007), 28.

⁹⁸ Balzer, *Thin Places: An Evangelical Journey into Celtic Christianity*, 29.

⁹⁹ Craig J. Sefa, "Toward an Ecclesiology of Presence" (DMin diss., Duke Divinity School, 2022), 7.

If thin places are where the line between heaven and earth disappears, then there is no thinner place than the incarnation of Jesus when God touches earth in the flesh.¹⁰⁰ Sefa states, “By extension, I suggest a movement toward an ‘ecclesiology of presence’ in which the church as Christ’s body on earth continues to embody God’s presence in the world.”¹⁰¹ The ecclesiology of presence reveals the nature and structure of the church being surrendered in a physical place to experience God’s presence. Sefa further states, “Following his resurrection and ascension, Christ desires that the church continues as a thin place in the world, empowered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the body of Christ through which all might encounter the presence of God.”¹⁰² Church locations represent the thin place and incarnate Christ.

God honors people’s creations of gratitude for Him

Throughout scripture and history, when humans experience the goodness of God, they have consistently built something to honor God. God does not need a temple, building, or anything made by humans. God created the universe and is not in need of possessions. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands” (Acts 17:24). However, when people have built earthly facilities, altars, and places to purely honor God, God responds by honoring the giver and is pleased. Abel gave his best offering, and God honored him.

¹⁰⁰ Sefa, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Presence,” 9.

¹⁰¹ Sefa, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Presence,” 9

¹⁰² Sefa, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Presence,” 9-10.

People in the western world build facilities for their families, schools, businesses, entertainment, and rest. A facility built and dedicated to God makes sense for many in the culture of the western way of life. However, creating a place for God is not limited to physical circumstances. Sefa states, “For those who spend most of their lives in crowded and chaotic spaces, it is valuable to remember that sacred space need not be a physical space at all. One vital form of sacred space both within and beyond the walls of the church is silence.”¹⁰³ God honors the physical and the spiritual place that is created to spend time with Jesus.

Issues From Related Contemporary Literature

Gerhard Lohfink communicates the problems of an overly emphasized individualistic Christianity and those that define the church as only spiritual in his book *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimensions of Christian Faith*. Lohfink does not discount the need for individual relationships with God but reveals the undeniable call to engage in the community of Christ. He argues against the believers omitting the undeniable aspects of being born into the body of Christ and the physical church’s value. Lohfink writes, “It seems to me that the mobile religious unit in Berlin is a perfect symbol of this supermarket-church, which takes care of individuals, provides for them, and leaves them in their anonymity.”¹⁰⁴

The same consumer-based church member ideology that Lohfink reveals in Berlin is evident in the western church member’s habits. The narrow emphasis on a personal relationship

¹⁰³ Sefa, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Presence,” 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (London, England: SPCK, 1985), 4.

with God and the spiritual church has diminished the importance of the corporate and physical gathering of believers. There should never be a competition between the spiritual and physical aspects of the church gathering or the individual and corporate walk with Christ because Christ's model requires them all to work together in the life of the believer.

Howard E. Friend Jr, founder of the Parish Empowerment Network, researched the definition of "sacred centers" in the posture of the Christian journey in his book *Recovering the Sacred Center*. The sacred center is not limited to the main gathering location of the believers. Friend writes, "The sacred center is often found in the contemplative silence of inward journeying. But it is also discovered out there in the world... in reeking slums and also trashy-strewn city streets, in old-age homes and children's wards, in mental hospitals and AIDS hospices."¹⁰⁵

The sacred center eludes a definitive definition even by Jesus and Paul. Instead of saying "the kingdom of heaven is," Jesus and Paul communicate in the scriptures "the kingdom of heaven is like."¹⁰⁶ Friend makes the point that each local place of worship and sacred center is unique to the individual and group. The local church gathering location should be intentionally guarded as a sacred space. Friend writes that, "Church, before it is a geographical location or even a gathering of people, is a quality of time and space. Before it is worship, program, and organization, it is climate, tone, feeling, and atmosphere. It is, or tragically it is not, sacred space, holy ground, sanctuary."¹⁰⁷ An intentional dedication to the sacred location of the local church spills over to sacred locations, furthering spiritual formation throughout the community.

¹⁰⁵ Howard E. Friend Jr., *Recovering the Sacred Center: Church Renewal from the Inside Out* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 32-33.

¹⁰⁶ Friend., *Recovering the Sacred Center*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ Friend, *Recovering the Sacred Center*, 56.

Social historian Joseph H. Hellerman, writes: “Spiritual formation occurs primarily in the context of community. People who remain connected with their brothers and sisters in the local church almost invariably grow in self-understanding, and they mature in their ability to relate in a healthy way” to God and others.¹⁰⁸ Being connected to the community of Christ oftentimes requires investing in a consistent group of believers by showing up and engaging in spiritual formation individually and corporately. The engagement results in working toward healthy relationships with God and the community of believers.

Hellerman places great value on faithfulness to a consistent local church; for people who stay connected and faithful through the trying times grow, but those who leave at the sign of difficulty do not grow.¹⁰⁹ Faithfulness in a sacred gathering location that facilitates a local community of Christ results in spiritual formation with God, self, and others. Hellerman further adds, “Our culture has powerfully socialized us to believe that personal happiness and fulfillment should take precedence over the connections we have with others in both our families and churches. So, we run from the painful but redemptive relationships God has placed us in.”¹¹⁰ Faithfulness to the local church community requires showing up to the designated gathering location and working through problems with others to result in spiritual formation and growth.

Salvation is an individual decision but a community-creating event. The relationship that believers engage in with God prepares them for relationship with Christ’s body.¹¹¹ Hellerman

¹⁰⁸ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, 1.

¹¹⁰ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, 1.

¹¹¹ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, 120.

points out that salvation is a “community creating” event, since you are born into the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the community of believers who make the bride of Christ. Individual salvation resulting in a “community creating” event brings great value to the community gathering location. The term “personal savior” never occurs in the New Testament. The term “God my savior” occurs only once in the New Testament, but every other time when communicating salvation in the New Testament, the words “Christ our Savior” or “Savior of the world” are presented.¹¹²

God does not want the church to discount individual salvation or corporate salvation, but embraces them both. The individual grows closer to God and grows closer to the body of Christ. Hellerman writes, “Conversion to Christ involves both our justification and our *familification*, we gain a new Father and a new set of brothers and sisters when we respond to the gospel. It is time to communicate the biblical reality that personal salvation is a community-creating event.”¹¹³ The sacred nature of community calls for a new focus on the sacred value of church facility locations that facilitate community creating salvation events.

Robert J. Banks, biblical scholar, practical theologian, and cultural critic, argues that Paul emphasized the importance of preaching, teaching, and learning the Word of God, but also placed great emphasis on the physical expression of carrying out Christ’s mission. Banks writes, “Without action and affliction any claim to knowledge is only superficial or counterfeit. Paul’s insistence that thoughts and words be embodied in his readers’ lives springs from his belief that

¹¹² Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* 124.

¹¹³ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, 143.

we are essentially physical beings”¹¹⁴—physical beings that must take physical action in the posture of carrying out Christ’s mission in community.

Many of the physical expressions that Paul communicates can be consistently practiced in the church facility or location: water baptism, spirit baptism, laying on of hands, the common meal, fellowship, outreach, and the eucharist.¹¹⁵ Banks writes, “Paul did not found communes as he moved around the ancient world, but this does not mean that he did not challenge common attitudes towards property. Those who became members of his communities could never again look on what they owned with the same eyes.”¹¹⁶ The goal of this study is to battle against the common attitudes toward church facility locations and to look upon the gathering places God has provided with a new perspective as sacred spaces dedicated to God.

Paul lived to preach the gospel and message of Christ. Paul was connected to many different local church congregations and established many new church gathering locations. The ecumenical involvement of Paul was like few others in the history of the church. He remained on the move, but his life’s work could still be seen as investing in the sacred locations that were established for the gathering of the body of Christ. Banks writes, “Despite their different orientations, the ‘work’ and the ‘churches’ participate in each other’s activities in various ways.

Paul and those involved in other missions seek to nurture the small communities they have founded and lead them to Christian adulthood.”¹¹⁷ Paul’s evangelistic work always led to establishing a local gathering where the new believers could join together, and Paul did help guide them to maturity. The establishment and growth of local church gatherings are the ultimate

¹¹⁴ Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 77.

¹¹⁵ Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 77-87.

¹¹⁶ Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 87.

¹¹⁷ Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 163.

goal in Paul’s evangelism, mission work, and oversight throughout his, as well as his followers’, ministry.

Redeeming a place as sacred

God created the world and everything in it and said His creation is good. Everything God creates is holy. Some of God’s creations do not remain holy because of sin, but the original intent is always to be holy. It is fundamental that the redemptive blood of Jesus redeems people as holy sons and daughters of God. However, can people who dedicate a place to God redeem it as holy? Scott Holmes, the Louisiana District Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, was asked in an interview if sacred places exist throughout the church. Holmes responded, “You can prove they exist because of Bethel.”¹¹⁸

He expounded on scripture and then asked an interesting question: “The challenge is what makes them sacred? A predetermined place from God? Or is it something we can create to make it sacred? I would lean toward the second.”¹¹⁹ The sacred place is a place of joy, affirmation, and the Holy Spirit.¹²⁰ The created spaces are redeeming the original intent of holiness created by God. Dr. Holmes said, “You can walk through the architecture of a building and tell the philosophy of ministry for that church.”¹²¹

Again, Leviticus 25:23 states, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Throughout the land that you hold

¹¹⁸ Scott Holmes, interview by author, Shreveport, LA, September 23, 2022.

¹¹⁹ Holmes, interview by author.

¹²⁰ Holmes, interview by author.

¹²¹ Holmes, interview by author

as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.” The church must continually practice redeeming what God has given through enhancing and expanding the sacred place of the gathering.

The architecture of the church building is important to match the vision of the church’s community and culture. Gary Larson is an expert in church architecture and has built some of the largest church facilities in America. Larson said the first thing he does when planning a church facility is to sit down with the pastor. He asks the pastor in great detail how the vision, culture, and community will function in the facility.¹²² Habakkuk 3:2 states, “Write down the revelation and make it plain so the herald can run with it.”

Larson references how important community and culture are when beginning a church facility project. Moses received the vision from God concerning the Tabernacle and everything within the Tabernacle in detail (Ex 25-30). After God gave the instruction for building the Tabernacle to Moses, God provided Bezalel and Oholiab as the architects and builders that would build the facility God ordained (Ex 31:1-11). Larson sees himself as Bezalel and Oholiab. His objective is to build the vision that God has put in the heart of the pastor. Larson further said, “I hear the vision, I look at what is available, and I pray.”¹²³

Understanding the culture of the church is monumental for Larson and his team. He said it is the job of the architect to develop the “program” in being the spiritual needs and physical needs of the facility.¹²⁴ After years of building church facilities, Larson believes that creating an

¹²² Gary Larson, interview by author, Shreveport, LA, July 20, 2022.

¹²³ Larson, interview by author.

¹²⁴ Larson, interview by author.

excellent church facility that honors God physically and spiritually enhances the people's spiritual experience and community life in a place.¹²⁵

Conclusion

The engagement of contemporary sources reveals many of the same patterns as biblical theology concerning the existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facilities. The mission of Christ is to be the only mission of the church facility. Throughout scriptures and history, many people have built structures to worship God, and God has blessed many people within the church buildings. The church facility is a representation of the incarnate Christ, where the gathering can access the presence of God. Salvation is a community-creating event where the believer is born into the body of Christ. Sacred locations exist because God made the world and everything in it Holy (Lev 11:45).

The existence of church facilities has been present since the early church. The existence of the church facility has mirrored the imperfections of humanity but must always strive to get closer to God. Jesus has called the believers to enhance the place that has been given. Excellence in stewarding and enhancing the place pleases God. Excellence in planning a building that reflects the church's community and culture will positively affect the spiritual life and community life of the believer. The expansion of the church facility happens when believers are changed spiritually, experience community life, and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

¹²⁵ Larson, interview by author.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT NARRATIVE AND FIELDWORK

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of a church facility's existence, enhancement, and expansion in both the church and local communities by focusing on Shreveport Community (SC) Church's Kid City Parties (KCP). By focusing on one facility within the many facilities of SC Church, the goal was to impact the entire operation of facility management within the SC Church umbrella. KCP is only one part of the many ministries that SC Church oversees for the church community and people living in its surrounding area. The survey reveals strengths, weaknesses, and potential growth within the SC Church facility management systems. The methodology section includes the research setup, design model, site, questionnaire format, campus enhancements, research participants, and data collection and analysis.

Research Design

A quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design¹ was conducted with KCP patrons to measure the effects of their experience in an existing SC Church facility by enhancing the functionality, signage, management, follow-up, and Sunday service invitations. The specific research methodology selected for study purposes was a survey research approach.

In this study, "expansion" was defined as numerical and/or spiritual within the church facility and is the grading scale of growth. Growth can be defined as increasing new church attendees and/or expanding spiritual awareness within KCP customers. The research design and

¹ Fraenkel, et al, 2019.

methodology were adopted for use in the study to evaluate perceptions of the enhancement of KCP facilities that might guide best practices that SC Church might utilize to achieve growth, both within the church community and among people living in the local area.

Research Site

Kid City Parties served as the research site in the study. KCP has been in operation within the facilities of SC Church since 2008. Kid City Parties offers the amenities of a party room, arcade, and three-story playscape for kids' birthday parties. SC Café is connected to KCP and offers coffee, drinks, and food. The first year KCP and SC Café opened, it was estimated that over thirty thousand people who did not attend SC Church walked through their doors. Understanding the best way to invite and impact people from the community within the facilities of SC Church would benefit both the church community and the local neighborhood.

The surrounding community associated with the study's research site provides daily opportunities to enjoy the amenities of SC Café and SC Parties. Since 2020, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, Kid City Parties have not returned to the pre-pandemic numbers of recorded parties. The 2022 average number of Kid City Parties was down by 50 percent, compared to pre-pandemic numbers. The difference in attendance was taken into consideration, and twenty post-pandemic interviews were still achieved. Along with the previously stated objectives, more KCP patrons, SC Café customers, and even surpassing pre-COVID-19 numbers would be desired outcomes.

Survey Format

The survey items were designed to elicit perceptions of customers' experience within KCP regarding the church community, its neighbors, the awareness of Jesus, their need for prayer, and accepting an invitation to church. A 5-point Likert-type survey represented the study's research instrument. A total of 20 participants were surveyed in 2023 for study purposes. The surveys were specifically conducted through individual phone interviews. Two items were designed to elicit the participants' need for prayer and acceptance of an invitation to church. The survey was specifically designed to elicit study participant perceptions of experience regarding the enhancements enacted at the facility since 2020. The study's survey items were tailored to assess perceptions of the impact of facility enhancements since 2020 for elements of customer experience.

Campus Enhancements

The campus enhancements made after 2020 are designed to illuminate Christ's mission and to bring people to Jesus (Matt 28:16-20). Measuring the functionality within the facility was a major aspect of the study. The KCP enhancements included the KCP worker giving a presentation to each party where they communicated gratitude for being at KCP, Jesus Christ, SC Church service times, and invited everyone to church. Also, the KCP worker gave each party a tour of SC Kids church theatre and explained what to expect in a Sunday service. Next, a large sign was put up in the party room that said, "SC Church: Sunday Services 9 am and 11 am. Making disciples of Jesus Christ." Also, a special gift was given to the birthday kids with an added coupon they could redeem at a Sunday service for another special gift. Finally, the same

questionnaire used in this study became the follow-up process to ask about each customer's experience and invite the customer to church.

The last item in the survey invited the participants to be the interviewer's personal guests to church. In one of the previous survey items, study participants are asked about the likelihood that they would attend SC Church. Also, in another previous question, the participant is asked if the changes made to KCP inspired them to worship at SC Church. Although these survey items are very close to inviting the participants to church, the final item being a direct invitation is now non-negotiable in the follow-up process and part of the facility operation management. The new process is an example of the survey producing new facility management functionality for the future of SC Church.

Study Participants

The study's sampling technique was broadly non-probability in nature and convenient/purposive by definition.² Study participants consisted of 20 different parents and guardians of kids who had birthday parties at KCP between September 2022 and January 2023. The geographic areas of the participants were all Shreveport patrons, except for one Texarkana resident. Each participant was presented with survey items represented on the study's research instrument during the phone interviews. The selection study participants followed the chronological order of the most recent parties that had occurred at KCP prior to the interview date, February 2023. Phone calls were conducted until all 20 participants completed the survey. If a participant was not able to complete

² Adams & Lawrence, 2019.

the entire survey call or the participant did not answer, the interview was discarded and not used in the research.

One weakness in the study was that it is a posttest-only research design. The practicality, planning, and likelihood of the same 20 participants accepting an invitation for their child to have a party before and after the facility enhancements were made at KCP did not present itself as a possibility. However, the quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design provided solid research results and metrics for SC Church facilities to move forward. Even though there is only one survey group, the data produced revelations of strengths, weaknesses, and next steps for KCP and SC Church facilities.

Data Collection

The collection of the data occurred in January 2023, after enhancements were made to KCP. The improvements were made in August 2022. SEU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received in January 2023, before the data collection began. All the phone calls happened on February 2, 2023. A free coffee from SC Café was offered as an incentive to take the survey. Since a free coffee is already offered for every first-time guest at SC Church, the incentive was not noted in the IRB approval.

The questions were asked in the same order as shown in Appendix A. The names of the individuals were not recorded, but the information provided in the KCP contract were used for data analysis. The data collection process was conducted by the interviewer who recorded each response. The data analysis and research assessment focused on the impact that KCP facility enhancements made on each customer's experience.

Data Analysis

Prior to the analysis of the study's research questions, preliminary analyses were conducted. Specifically, descriptive statistical evaluations of missing data and essential demographic information were analyzed for comparative purposes.

Missing data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Descriptive statistical techniques were utilized to assess the study's response set data within the overarching construct of KPC changes since 2020. The study's survey item response data were specifically addressed using the descriptive statistical techniques of frequencies (n), measures of typicality (mean scores), variability (minimum/maximum; standard deviations), standard errors of the mean (SE_M), and data normality (skew; kurtosis).

Analysis by Research Question

The study's research questions were addressed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts (n), measures of central tendency (mean scores), and variability (minimum/maximum; standard deviation), standard errors of the mean, and data normality (skew; kurtosis) represented the primary descriptive statistical techniques that were used to address the study's formally stated research questions.

In research questions one through three, a one sample t test was used to assess the statistical significance of participant mean response within each of the research questions. The assumption of data normality was addressed through inspection of the dependent variable's skew and kurtosis values. The alpha level of $p \leq .05$ was adopted for use as the threshold value for statistical significance of findings. Cohen's d was used to assess the magnitude of response effect

in findings for each of the three research questions. Sawilowsky's³ parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were used to determine the magnitude of response effect within each of the three research questions.

The analysis of study data was conducted using IBM's 29th version of its Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Conclusion

By following the pattern of the project methodology, this study shed some light on the area of the

KCP facility's existence, enhancement, and expansion in the church community and local community. The research design model proved beneficial while also exposing some weaknesses within the research design. The project site enhanced the facility's functionality while revealing potential areas of improvement. The questionnaire format incorporated a posttest-only research design to test the benefits of facility improvements. The campus enhancements proved beneficial for the KCP facility's functionality. The research participants were successfully surveyed in determining their individual, group, and overall favorability ratings. The data collection and analysis have moved the researcher further along in the area of church facility functionality and also revealed weaknesses and opportunities for the next study

³ Sawilowsky's 2009.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT EVALUATED

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings. A quantitative, pre-experimental, posttest-only research design was used for study purposes in evaluating the efficacy of KCP changes enacted since 2020. The specific research methodology used in the study was a survey research approach. The sample of participants for the study was twenty. Three additional research questions will be explored in this chapter to address the main research question. The main research question is "What effect exists between the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a church facility and the life experience (spirit, mind, and body) of the SC Church congregation and the Shreveport community?" The three additional research questions also will be stated to address the research problem and purpose. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used in the analysis of study data. Study data were analyzed and reported using the 29th version of IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).¹

The following represents the formal reporting of study finding at the preliminary, foundational descriptive statistical level of analyses and for the analyses associated with the study's three research questions.

¹ Kennia Garcia, "What's New in SPSS Statistics 29," IBM, September 12, 2022, <https://community.ibm.com/community/user/ai-datascience/blogs/kennia-garcia/2022/08/08/whats-new-in-spss-statistics-29>.

Preliminary Findings: Descriptive Statistical Analyses and Demographic Variables

The study's demographic information was evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques. The study's demographic information was specifically addressed using the descriptive statistical techniques of frequencies (*n*) and percentages (%).

Table 1 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study's demographic identifying information of participant gender, visitor desire to be prayed for, and the likelihood of attending Sunday Church service.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics summary table: Demographic Variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	17	85.00	85.00
Male	3	15.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Visitor Desire for Prayer</i>			
No	11	55.00	55.00
Yes	9	45.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Sunday Church Guest</i>			
No	12	60.00	60.00
Yes	7	35.00	95.00
Maybe	1	5.00	100.00

Table 2 contains a summary of findings for the descriptive statistical analysis of the responses to the ten survey items on the research instrument by Likert scale category of response (strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree):

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Summary Table: Study participant’s response by category for the 10 survey items on the research instrument

Survey Item	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
<i>KCP Positive Influence in Community</i>			
Strongly Agree	20	100.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>KCP Positive Effect on SC Church</i>			
Strongly Agree	18	90.00	90.00
Unsure	2	10.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Exceptional Quality of KCP Facility</i>			
Strongly Agree	17	85.00	85.00
Disagree	1	5.00	90.00
Agree	2	10.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Exceptional Service at KCP</i>			
Strongly Agree	19	95.00	95.00
Agree	1	5.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Personal Invitation to SC Sunday Service</i>			
Strongly Agree	20	100.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Christ’s Presence Evident in KCP Experience</i>			
Strongly Agree	17	85.00	85.00
Unsure	2	10.00	95.00
Agree	1	5.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>KCP/SC Relationship Evident in Signage</i>			
Strongly Agree	18	90.00	90.00
Unsure	2	10.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>Interest in Attending Church Services via KCP Invitation</i>			
Strongly Agree	13	65.00	65.00
Unsure	1	5.00	70.00
Agree	3	15.00	85.00

Strongly Disagree	3	15.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>SC Kids Theater Tour Beneficial</i>			
Strongly Agree	15	75.00	75.00
Unsure	3	15.00	90.00
Agree	1	5.00	95.00
Strongly Disagree	1	5.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<i>KCP Changes Inspired SC Church Attendance</i>			
Strongly Agree	14	70.00	70.00
Unsure	4	20.00	90.00
Agree	1	5.00	95.00
Strongly Disagree	1	5.00	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00

Descriptive Statistics: Survey Item Response Set

Descriptive statistical techniques were utilized to assess the responses within the overarching construct of KPC changes since 2020 identified for study purposes. The study’s response data were specifically addressed using the descriptive statistical techniques of frequencies (n), measures of typicality (mean scores), variability (minimum/maximum; standard deviations), standard errors of the mean (SE_M), and data normality (skew; kurtosis).

Table 3 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study’s response set data of ten survey items represented on the research instrument.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics summary table: Study participant response by survey item represented on the research instrument

Survey Item/KPC Element	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SE_M</i>	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Positive Influence (Community)	5.00	0.00	20	0.00	5.00	5.00	-	-
Positive Effect for SC Church	4.80	0.62	20	0.14	3.00	5.00	-2.67	5.11
Exceptional Quality (KCP Facility)	4.75	0.72	20	0.16	2.00	5.00	-3.14	9.18
Exceptional Service KCP	4.95	0.22	20	0.05	4.00	5.00	-4.13	15.05
Invitation SC Sunday Service	5.00	0.00	20	0.00	5.00	5.00	-	-
Christ's Presence at KCP	4.75	0.64	20	0.14	3.00	5.00	-2.25	3.37
KCP/SC Relationship Evident	4.80	0.62	20	0.14	3.00	5.00	-2.67	5.11
Interest in SC Attendance via KCP	4.15	1.46	20	0.33	1.00	5.00	-1.51	0.70
Kids Theater Tour as Beneficial	4.45	1.10	20	0.25	1.00	5.00	-1.94	2.94
SC Church Attendance via KCP	4.35	1.14	20	0.25	1.00	5.00	-1.60	1.70

Table 4 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study's response set for overall perceptual data associated with the study's construct of KPC changes since 2020 by gender of study participant.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics summary table: Overall study perceptions by gender of study participant

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SE_M</i>	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Female								
Overall	4.72	0.31	17	0.07	4.10	5.00	-0.91	-0.41
Male								
Overall	4.57	0.38	3	0.22	4.30	5.00	0.65	-1.50

Missing Data/Survey Completion Rate

The extent of data missingness of the study within the essential survey response sets was assessed using the descriptive statistical techniques of frequencies (*n*) and percentages (%). As a

result, there were no missing data to report. The concomitant survey completion rate was, therefore, exceptional at 100%.

Findings by Research Question

The study topic, research problem, and purpose were addressed through the statement of three research questions. The probability level of $p < .05$ represented the threshold value for study findings to be considered statistically significant within the three research questions. The following represents the reporting of findings by research questions stated.

Research question 1

To what degree did study participants perceive the changes at KCP since 2020 as inspiring of SC Church attendance?

The one sample t test was used to assess the statistical significance mean response to overall perceptions that KCP changes were inspiring of SC church attendance. The assumption of data normality associated with the use of the one sample t test was addressed through the inspection of the skew and kurtosis values of the data array. Using the conventions of data normality by means of data skewness and kurtosis proposed by George and Mallery,² the skew value of -1.94 and kurtosis value of 2.94 were well within the skewness parameters of $-/+2.0$ and kurtosis parameters of $-/+ 7.0$, therefore satisfying of the assumption of data normality for the use of the one sample t test.

The overall mean response of 4.35 ($SD = 1.14$) to study participant perceptions that KCP changes were inspiring of SC church attendance was statistically significant ($t_{(19)} = 5.31, p <$

² George and Mallery, 2020.

.001). The magnitude of effect for study participant response to overall perceptions that KCP changes were inspiring of SC church attendance was considered very large at $d = 1.19$.³

Table 5 contains a summary of the finding for overall perceptions that KCP changes were inspiring of SC church attendance.

Table 5. Summary table: One sample t-test finding for study participant perceptions that KCP changes were inspiring of SC Church attendance

Survey Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	μ	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
KCP Changes (Item 10)	4.35	1.14	3	5.31	< .001	1.19
<i>Note.</i> Degrees of Freedom for the <i>t</i> -statistic = 19. <i>d</i> represents Cohen's <i>d</i> .						

Research question 2

Which of the 10 elements of KPC changes since 2020 reflected the greatest degree of study participant response effect?

Cohen’s statistical technique (*d*) was used to evaluate the magnitude of response effect for the identified elements of pathways to discipleship in the wake of the study’s intervention variable. The conventions of effect size interpretation proposed by Sawilowsky were applied in the analysis and interpretation of finding in research question two.⁴

As a result, study participants’ responses within all ten elements were reflected as noteworthy statistically significant ($p < .001$) levels. Five elements (62.5%) reflected huge response effects ($d \geq 2.0$), with two elements (25%) reflecting very large response effects ($d \geq$

³ Shlomo S. Sawilowsky, “New effect size rules of thumb,” *Journal of Modern Applied Statistical Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 597-599.

⁴ Sawilowsky, “New Effect Size Rules of Thumb,” 597-599.

1.20). One element (12.5%), “attending church services via KCP invitation,” reflected a large response effect ($d \geq .80$). The element reflecting the single greatest degree of response effect in the study in the wake of the intervention was the element of “exceptional service at KCP” ($d = 8.72$).

Table 6 contains a summary of the findings for the evaluation of study participant response effects for the ten elements of KPC changes since 2020.

Table 6. Summary table: Response effect by element for KPC changes (mean; t value; and d value)

KPC Element	Mean	t	d
KCP as a Positive Influence in Community	5.00	---	—
KCP’s Positive Effect on SC Church	4.80	13.08***	2.92 ^a
Exceptional Quality of KCP Facility	4.75	10.93***	2.44 ^a
Exceptional Service at KCP	4.95	39.00***	8.72 ^a
Personal Invitation to SC Sunday Service	5.00	---	—
Christ’s Presence Evident in KCP Experience	4.75	12.25***	2.72 ^a
KCP/SC Relationship Evident in Signage	4.80	13.08***	2.92 ^a
Attending Church Services via KCP Invitation	4.15	3.52***	.79 ^c
SC Kids Theater Tour Beneficial	4.45	5.90***	1.32 ^b
KCP Changes Inspired SC Church Attendance	4.35	5.31***	1.19 ^b

*** $p \leq .001$ ^a Huge Effect ($d \geq 2.0$) ^b Very Large Effect ($d \geq 1.20$) ^c Large Effect ($d \geq .80$)

Research question 3

Was there an overall statistically significant effect for study participants’ perceptions for KCP changes since 2020?

The one sample t test was used to assess the statistical significance mean response to overall perceptions of KCP changes since 2020. The assumption of data normality associated with the

use of the one sample *t* test was addressed through the inspection of the data array's skew and kurtosis values. Using the conventions of data normality that apply data skewness and kurtosis proposed by George and Mallery,⁵ the skew value of -0.70 and kurtosis value of -0.87 were well within the skewness parameters of -/+2.0 and kurtosis parameters of -/+ 7.0, therefore satisfying of the assumption of data normality for the use of the one sample *t* test.

The overall mean response of 4.70 (*SD* = 0.31) to study participants' perceptions of KCP changes was statistically significant ($t_{(19)} = 24.43, p < .001$). The magnitude of effect for the study participants' response to overall perceptions of KCP changes since 2020 was considered huge at $d = 5.46$.⁶

Table 7 contains a summary of finding for the overall perceptions that KCP changes since 2020.

Table 7. Summary table: One sample t test finding for study participant perceptions of KCP changes since 2020

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	μ	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
KCP Overall	4.70	0.31	3	24.43	< .001	5.46
<i>Note.</i> Degrees of Freedom for the <i>t</i> -statistic = 19. <i>d</i> represents Cohen's <i>d</i> .						

⁵ George, *IBM SPSS Statistics 23 Step by Step: A Simple Guide and Reference*.

⁶ Sawilowsky, "New Effect Size Rules of Thumb," 598.

Summary

The study's sample of participants was twenty. The essential data arrays within the survey item response sets reflected no missing data. A statistically significant, very large response effect was observed for study participant perceptions that KPC changes since 2020 inspired SC church attendance. A statistically significant, huge response effect was observed for study participant perceptions of overall KPC changes since 2020. Statistically significant response effects were observed in all ten of the PCP change elements, with 87.5% reflecting very large to huge response effects. The element reflecting the single greatest degree of response effect in the study was the KPC change element of "exceptional service at KCP."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Throughout the journey of exploring the value of church facilities, there have been some anticipated and unforeseen results along the way. The researcher did not expect to find such depth in the scriptures and in theology to support the necessity of the gathering location for the church body. Nor did the researcher expect to uncover such a wide range of events that have taken place within each holy location throughout history. The researcher did expect to find a relationship between the pattern of the existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facilities, and was delighted to find evidence, throughout the biblical-theological review, contemporary literature, and research project supporting these claims.

Church Facility Theology Summary

The existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facilities encompass a much broader scale than what is reflected in this study. The existence of gathering locations for believers is undeniable throughout the scriptures. The gathering place was consistently referred to as holy, sacred, and set apart for Yahweh throughout the Bible.¹ The believers do not create the holy location but redeem that which was declared holy by God. Psalms 24:1 proclaims, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” The Lord allows the church

¹ Brand, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

gathering to participate in redeeming his creation through the power of agreement in a specific location.

The definition of the church location is any place that is consistently set apart as a gathering place for the local church body. If a location is set apart or consecrated to exalt Jesus, then it serves a sacred purpose to the body of Christ. History reveals that the church gathering cannot be silenced and even thrives through persecution. The example of the early church thriving through the persecution of the Roman Empire gives hope that the church of today and of the future will continue to rise through every season. The imperfections of humanity will always be factors that limit God and will always be present. However, God works through the imperfections of humanity when there is surrender and gratitude for what He has given.

The foundation of holy gathering locations is established throughout the scriptures and can be observed in many sacred places, sacred facilities, and sacred altars. The Garden of Eden, Jacob's well, the Jordan River, the Promised Land, and Mount Moriah are a few of the holy places God set apart as consistent gathering locations where believers experienced God's presence and community. Noah's Ark, the Temple, the Tabernacle, the Upper Room, and house churches are a few of the sacred facilities that were utilized by God's people to obey God's commands and to facilitate the gathering of God's people. Sacred altars and monuments are mentioned throughout Scripture, and today's believers can build spiritual altars through worship, gratitude, confession, and forgiveness.

Experiencing God's presence and community is not limited to sacred locations, facilities, or altars. God is limitless and can decide to move however and whenever He decides. After all, the entire earth and all creation are made by God; therefore, all creation is holy. However, God gives believers opportunities to steward what has been given. The responsibility of stewardship

regarding the facilities and locations that serve as consistent church gatherings must not be overlooked. The stewardship of church facilities is sacred because the gathering is sacred. The grading scale of stewardship is met with the expectation of excellence defined by giving God the best.

A Christ-centered mission requires an all-encompassing surrender to God's direction. The mission of the church must be centered on Christ's mission in its facilities, organization, teaching, generosity, and worship. A Christ-centered church mission results in the church becoming the exemplification of the incarnate Christ on earth. People came to see Jesus in the flesh when He walked the earth and to experience His presence and the community of believers that surrounded Him. Today, people come to their local church gathering in a building, the physical gathering place of the body of Christ, to experience God's presence and a community centered on Jesus.

God's presence creates "thin places" where heaven meets earth and there is a blurring of the lines between the physical and the spiritual realities. Craig J. Sefa states, "Thin Places are places of Holy encounter between heaven and earth, between sacred and ordinary."² The ecclesiology of presence reveals the nature and structure of the church being surrendered in a physical place to experience God's presence. God honors people's creations of gratitude for Him. God honors when believers gather in physical locations and spiritual places that are created to spend time with Jesus. Where two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is there (Matt 18:20), and it redeems a representation of the incarnate Christ, heaven touches earth, and God always responds.

² Sefa, "Toward an Ecclesiology of Presence," 7.

Salvation is an individual decision, but it is also a community-creating event. When a believer is born again, he/she is born into the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the physical and spiritual gathering of believers on earth. To live a life detached from the body robs the believer of the abundant life. The existence, enhancement, and expansion of church facilities are of monumental importance for the church to steward and create Christ-centered missional purpose. The existence of holy locations is established by understanding that everything God creates is holy. The enhancement of each location requires the stewardship of excellence and the believer's best efforts. The expansion of church facilities is the physical and spiritual growth of the gathering location that God has entrusted to the believer.

Lessons Learned

Within the research model, I had hoped that something good would happen, but I was pleasantly surprised by the strength of the overall survey response analysis. The overall effect of the Kid City Parties (KCP) research study proved beneficial in the journey of understanding how to create Christ-centered mission-oriented church facilities. Overall, the research questionnaire proved to be statistically significant with a mean average of 4.7 out of a possible 5. According to the overall results, there was less than one chance in a thousand that the responses could have happened by coincidence. The overall effect size was 5.46 and categorized as a huge effect. Although there are limitations to this research, there are many positive takeaways that contribute the theology of church facilities.

The question about KCP's exceptional service received the largest effect score of 15.05. The question about KCP's facility excellence received the second-best effect score of 9.18. The

customer service and facility excellence were two of the main facility enhancements, so it was encouraging that they were a huge effect on the survey results. The top two mean scores were the “positive influence on the community” and “invitation to church” questions, each with perfect scores of 5.0. It should be noted that because they both received perfect scores, and since there were no variations, they received no effect scores. Even so, the numbers are helpful for future assessments to evaluate what areas are growing and what areas need improvement.

Another unanticipated finding was that the lowest score on all accounts was the question about the customer’s interest in attending an SC Church service. Some of these scores were 1 out of 5, but most of users attended other churches in town. Instead of the participant scoring the question as a 3 (unknown), they selected a 1 (extremely disagree). Many of them scored high on all the other questions and selected a 1 only on this one question. A weakness of this questionnaire is that there was no space for “tell me more.” It would have been helpful to know if the participant scored a 1 because of their loyalty to their home church, or if they were offended to receive an invitation, or something different altogether. However, the mean score was still 4.15, resulting in a massive positive effect.

An interesting dynamic was that there were three questions that had to do with accepting an invitation to an SC Church service. These three responses greatly differed and that was also unexpected. The first question was discussed previously, considering the interest of the participant attending SC Church. As stated before, this question was the lowest grade of the first ten survey questions. The second question concerning church attendance was whether the KCP changes inspired the participant to attend SC Church. This question received the second-lowest mean score at 4.35, while still achieving a positive effect.

The third question regarding an invitation to SC Church was a “yes” or “no” format, so it does not have a mean score or effect value. This third question asked if the participant would be the interviewer’s personal guest at an SC Church service. Twelve participants answered no, seven answered yes, and one answered maybe. The final question resulted in 60% declining an invitation, with 40% accepting. The other two questions received 83% and 87% positive scores. However, the positive scores are not a committed acceptance to come to church. These three questions have many more variables that could not be explored because of the limited questionnaire. Again, it would have been helpful to follow up with “tell me more” after these questions. It would have been useful to know if they said “no” because they attended other churches, had social anxiety, just do not want to go, or something else.

Asking the participant if they desired prayer was a very positive practice that will be incorporated from now on in the KCP follow-up process. One of the participants said they wanted prayer and began to cry on the phone as the interviewer prayed for them. The same participant also accepted the invitation to SC Church, came the next Sunday, and gave his life to Christ.

This entire study was worth it just for that one life that was saved. Although the numbers were not high on accepting the offer for prayer, the ones who did provided special moments with the Lord. The ones who declined still appreciated the gesture. Out of all the questions, this one brings Christ’s mission to the center of facility management in the clearest way.

Evaluating KCP by enhancing the facilities to operate through Christ-centered missional values has provided a clear pathway to the next steps of action. Establishing the theological understanding of how God cares that we give our best in the stewardship of church facilities results in the continual enhancement of church life within these facilities. Every church gathering

has a culture of its own. When a culture establishes its core values that are attached to the Christ-centered mission, there will always be a compass of how each facility must exist, enhance, and expand for the glory of God.

Considerations for the Future

There are many considerations for future research after completing this project. A replication of this study could be done with a greater sample. The twenty people who were part of this one proved beneficial and resulted in positive feedback regarding the changes made at KCP.

However, with a larger group, the numbers would be more robust and provide a greater depth of understanding. The survey was taken by 20 participants, out of which 17 were female and only 3 were male. With a greater sample, there would be the ability to see how the changes are impacting wider groups and more varied situations.

It would be advantageous to make this survey a recurring follow-up process with KCP customers. Regularly evaluating and talking to the customers will reveal if KCP is remaining excellent in facility enhancement or if we are sliding in some areas. Consistent follow-up is also a practical application of Christ-centered missional excellence and is evangelical in nature. Consistent follow-up also reveals if the KCP employees are operating with excellence and will bring a new level of accountability to the KCP facility process. The regular survey will seek to reveal what is working and what needs to change within the facility management process.

A major change would be to use a structured survey involving open-ended questions. The survey could be a blend of quantitative questions followed by qualitative open-ended ones. The open-ended questions would give greater depth to understanding the target audience and why the

participants answered the way they did. Understanding if a person is loyal to a different church in town and biased in their answers or if a person hates the church would all be helpful data points. Obtaining richer and fuller data within the study's topic would be the objective of adding the qualitative open-ended survey.

Limitations to the Project

The greatest limitation of the research is that there was no pre-test survey to compare to the post-test survey. The greatest obstacle in performing a pre-test was twofold. First, there could have been a pre-test with the same group experiencing KCP “before and after” facility changes were made. The challenge is to find twenty families that would be willing to have two parties in KCP a few months or even years apart. The logistical planning of having the same group three years apart would be a challenge. Second, there could have been surveys given before and after facility enhancements were made. However, this data would be compromised because they would be two different groups. The limitation is that this research is a post-test-only survey, but the organization and planning were still able to achieve successful data. As stated before, the sample size being only 20 participants was also a limitation.

Another limitation was that the background information for each participant was not in-depth enough. The only information that was completed on their KCP form was their name, email, phone number, and party plan they selected. Understanding if the customer was a parent, kin, close friend, or guardian of the birthday child would have been helpful data points. Obtaining how they heard about KCP, where they lived, whether they had been to a party before,

and other pertinent information would have proven helpful to understand why they chose certain answers. In the future, there should be a more in-depth KCP purchase request form.

The inability to measure the God-ordained change and influence is another limitation. The God-ordained influence is defined as things that we do not prepare for in our facility enhancements. However, God decides to step in and move regardless of our faults. The God factor is when the Lord moves in areas where no human can take responsibility through their planning. A weakness in this questionnaire is that there was no place that separated the facility enhancement impact and observed solely the God impact. As human beings, we give God our best, we plan with excellence, and we enhance our facilities, but if God does not decide to move it is all for nothing.

Concluding Remarks

The overall goal of this project was to explore the effect that exists between the existence, enhancement, and expansion of a church facility and the life experience (spirit, mind, and body) of the SC Church congregation and the Shreveport community. The theological review and contemporary literature engagement revealed that sacred locations, facilities, and altars have existed throughout the Bible. There are so many sacred places throughout the Bible that the research had to be limited to just a few select locations. The research also had to be limited within each selected location because there are endless connecting points throughout history regarding each location. The quantitative, pre-experimental, post-test-only research design displayed great value in enhancing KCP's facility to result in church and community expansion.

The biblical-theological review revealed many locations that were storied throughout the ages. Many of the same themes emerged throughout the different locations regarding victory, defeat, success, failure, trauma, redemption, God's presence, and believers gathering to honor God. The historical themes mirror the imperfect present-day church gatherings. Imperfect people represent a perfect God in the midst of a fallen world while having access to the perfection of the Holy Spirit. The enhancement of the church facility or gathering location must consistently be practiced throughout every season in order to achieve healthy church growth. Church facility enhancements throughout this study have resulted in the expansion of the body of Christ and the spiritual growth of disciples within SC Church.

SC Church has been able to incorporate the template of how KCP made facility enhancements to establish a new expectation throughout all SC Church's facilities. The KCP research survey has become the newly established follow-up process for KCP customers. The same follow-up process is also serving as a template in areas throughout other SC Church facilities. The sermons SC Church will gather from this study will also provide a greater depth to the practice of enhancing church facilities for the expansion of the church community and local community.

The foundational purpose of this exploration was to understand the power of facilities dedicated to the gathering of the body of Christ. The church is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22) and where two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is there (Matt 18:20). Throughout this research, I wanted to discover the greatest pattern for managing and stewarding church facilities. I am pleased with the truths that have been discovered throughout the biblical review, contemporary literature, and research experiment. More than ever, I am convinced that God

desires humanity's best and most excellent efforts, and then everything will depend on God moving. Without God, we are nothing. With God, anything is possible!

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APPENDIX A

Dennis Duron Dissertation Survey

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

KCP is a positive influence on the local community.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

KCP has had a positive effect on SC Church.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

KCP facilities are of exceptional quality.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

The service at KCP is exceptional.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

I was provided with a personal invitation to SC Church Sunday Service

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

Christ's mission is evident in the KCP experience.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

KCP signage enhanced my understanding of KCP's relationship with SC Church.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

KCP's invitation to church stimulated my interest in attending services.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

The tour of the SC Kids Theatre where Sunday services are held was beneficial to my understanding of KPC.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

The changes made to KCP since 2020 inspire me to worship at SC Church. (Special gift for the birthday kid, sign that says SC Church service times, tour of SC Kids theatre, invitation to church)

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Unsure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

Can I pray for you about anything?

Will you be my personal guest at a Sunday service?