

Public Abstract

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Experiencing Meaning in Two Presbyterian Churches: A Qualitative Analysis

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Worship has changed through the centuries (Jones, 2000 and White, 2003). In the mid 1800s, the feelings and emotions of the individual worshiper became an important consideration in church service (White, 2003). Little research has been conducted to ascertain the role architecture plays in this experience (MacDonald, 2002). Using a qualitative research format, this is a case study of two Presbyterian Churches in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

The overall goal of this study is to understand what creates feelings of meaning on Sunday mornings in these churches' sanctuaries. Five recurrent themes were discovered that seem to be necessary for these feelings: 1) large quantity of natural light, 2) feeling a connection with nature, 3) visible symbols of the Presbyterian faith, 4) optimal acoustics for music as well as the spoken word, and 5) architectural volume. Architects and interior designers should be able to apply these elements to the design of other Presbyterian Churches in order to create more meaningful spaces for the worshiper.