

# MAKING SPACE FOR INSPIRATION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research study explores the relationship between physical spaces and spiritual experiences, with a particular focus on church buildings and their impact on both Christians and non-Christians. The study examines how different environments affect people's sense of transcendence, comfort, and connection to faith, offering insights for church leaders on creating more meaningful and welcoming spaces.



## Key Findings:

### Transcendent Spaces

- **Nature ranks first:** 70% of U.S. adults consider nature to be transcendent, followed by Christian churches (62%)
- **Peace is primary:** A sense of peace or calm (51%) is the primary characteristic that makes a space feel transcendent
- **Regular transcendent experiences are uncommon:** Only 31% of U.S. adults regularly visit places they consider transcendent
- **Practicing Christians have a higher view** of church buildings as transcendent spaces (89%) compared to non-Christians (40%)

### Church Buildings & Sacred Space

- **Positive feelings predominate:** Most common emotions felt in church are peaceful (47%), connected to God (42%), and safe (40%)
- **Less common emotions:** Feeling in awe (11%), valued (20%), included (21%), at home (22%)
- **Beauty is lacking:** Only 37% of Christians believe their church is beautiful
- **Emotional disconnection:** Just 26% of Christians feel emotionally attached to their church building

### Emotional Responses to Church Spaces

#### Most common emotions felt in church:

- Peaceful (47%)
- Connected to God (42%)
- Safe (40%)

#### Less common emotions:

- In awe (11%)
- Valued (20%)
- Included (21%)
- At home (22%)

### Home vs. Church

- **People prefer homes for vulnerable topics:** Most U.S. adults prefer discussing loneliness (33%), depression (34%), and anxiety (35%) in someone's home
- **Churches for spiritual matters:** 44% of adults would discuss spiritual faith at a Christian church, rising to 72% among practicing Christians
- **Seeking comfort in crisis:** When feeling depressed, people are most likely to stay at home (59%) or go out in nature (52%)
- **Practicing Christians differ:** 67% say they would likely visit a church when feeling depressed, compared to only 14% of non-Christians



# Challenges and Opportunities:

## Key Challenges:

1. Limited emotional connection to church buildings
2. Lack of perceived beauty in church spaces
3. Difficulty motivating church attendance
4. Disconnect between church and daily life
5. Generation-specific barriers to engagement

## Strategic Opportunities:

1. Incorporate natural elements into church design
2. Create spaces that foster peace and calm
3. Design areas for both community and solitude
4. Balance sacred architecture with welcoming atmosphere
5. Consider multi-generational needs in space planning

# Recommendations for Church Leaders:

## Design Considerations

- Prioritize creating spaces that feel safe and peaceful
- Include elements of natural beauty
- Balance traditional sacred elements with contemporary comfort
- Create spaces that support both individual reflection and community gathering

## Implementation Strategies

1. Assess current spaces through the lens of emotional impact
2. Evaluate how building design reflects church mission and values
3. Consider both indoor and outdoor spaces in ministry planning
4. Create intentional areas for prayer and meditation
5. Design flexible spaces that serve multiple purposes

## Cultural Context

- Recognize the continued relevance of sacred spaces in secular society
- Acknowledge changing generational preferences
- Consider how church spaces can serve community needs
- Balance traditional elements with contemporary functionality



# Conclusion

The research demonstrates that physical spaces play a crucial role in spiritual experience and church engagement. While churches face challenges in creating connecting spaces for modern audiences, there are clear opportunities to design environments that support spiritual growth, community connection, and ministry effectiveness. Success requires intentional planning that considers both the practical and transcendent aspects of church spaces, while remaining mindful of diverse generational needs and preferences.