

Retro-Relational

Throughout the South you'll find Baptist churches built in a distinctive functional style: a square building with two side front entrance ways, narrow halls, and bathrooms hidden downstairs as if they were an afterthought. The building is pretty much all sanctuary, a spacious plain room without any sacerdotal connotation. A balcony encircles the room on two sides. This square box space with solid wood floors offers excellent acoustics. The room with its 20 foot tall cream-colored walls is full of light from a large set of colored glass windows in the front and on the side. The pulpit is off to the side and angled with solid wood pews fanning out. The dark wooden front has a slightly raised small platform with a simple lectern for preaching. A baptistry is behind the pulpit. The five-to-seven-member worship team is off to the side where in years past the choir sang. An inconspicuous black screen, mounted ten feet above the baptistry, displays praise songs, hymns, and God's word.



There is a surprising house church feel to this worship space, nothing is religious or ornate, and it is definitely not showy. But on Sunday morning at 8:00 a.m., the place is alive with the sound of friendship. The congregation makes the room at Redeemer Community Church, located a block away from Avondale Park in Birmingham. A couple hundred people, young adults in their twenties and thirties, together with young families, come together to worship the triune God. There is a genuine warmth that goes beyond the freshly brewed coffee that finds its inspiration in an Acts 2:42 approach to church. In the movies, you hear important people say, "May we have the room?" and everyone is expected to leave. At Redeemer, the Holy Spirit says, "Give me the room and everyone please stay!" The simplicity of prayer and song, preaching and communion, fits beautifully with the early church's house church worship. There is a sense of humble intentionality and a depth of biblical insight about the place. Strangers feel welcome without an overt appeal, simply because there is little to intimidate or make them feel awkward. There is no pressure, yet the passion for Christ is palpable.

Redeemer's retro building and her throwback to the early church fits with today's back-to-the-future post-Christendom household of faith. Increasingly Christ's followers are resident aliens in their home culture. Religion's cultural trappings are an impediment to the gospel of grace and a stripped down, unplugged household of faith concentrates on what really matters, worship and witness, faith and faithfulness, humility, and sacrifice. One reason church facilities aren't talked about in the New Testament may be because buildings pale in significance when compared to the body of Christ. It is as if everything said in the Old Testament about the Tabernacle and the Temple was transposed into a relational experience for the people of God. Meaningful discipleship can retrofit Baptist architecture into a beautiful household of faith in Christ, but you may have to knock out a few walls, open things up, remodel bathrooms, and install a state-of-the-art HVAC system.