

What's Different About a Church Building?

The Cloak, June 2024

I ran across a brief article in a recent issue of [The Christian Century](#) titled, “What’s Special About a Church Building?” by Brian Bantum (June 2024). I liked it and want to share the essence of it with you. Just an interesting take on what a church space is that differs from other public spaces. Bantum asks:

How many buildings or events do we pass by in our daily lives where we could simply stop, walk in, sit down, and participate — and this is what is actually expected, even hoped for? Imagine seeing a band playing in the park, and as I walk by I unpack my ukulele and simply start strumming along. (p. 38)

Bantum points out that most public spaces open for visitors — like concerts, museums and theaters — require subscriptions, memberships, tickets, etc. He asks: “How many buildings exist in virtually every neighborhood, every city and town, as little nooks of possibility, of sanctuary — where one can walk in and be reminded ‘you are loved, you are good!’ ... where you visit again and again, and after months you are transformed from stranger to kin, transformed from guest to host.” In fact, research has been done that has demonstrated real neurological effects in the brains of those who visit churches regularly, and shown “brain-soothing” neurological responses in the midbrain — reflecting a sense of safety and comfort as one is welcomed to the fold. “You belong and are so welcome!”

Let me just end this short piece by quoting Bantum at the end of his article:

If we appreciated the radical interruption of a place where anyone can come, sit, sing, be welcomed and invited to simply be, where each week we are hosting and being hosted, where all can be nourished ... in the end, we may have rich theologies of the church, but part of our uniqueness may have more to do with the ways we recognize just how unusual our gathering is in our community — and what that gathering might offer those who stumble in.

I truly believe that St. Martin’s is that kind of sanctuary — welcoming and transforming in the process. Thanks be to God!

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