

A Theology of Worship Spaces

A Guide For Home Churches

Home churches will benefit from pausing and taking time to consider how they understand *worship spaces*. Most home churches already understand that Christian worship is not confined to buildings. And most already do a good job talking about how “*God does not dwell in temples made by human hands.*” So most already have robust theological convictions that prevent them from reducing church to being *about* worship spaces. Yet the Church *is* called to assemble together in reverence and faith, which does *involve* our space.

Our understanding of the home church’s *worship spaces* begins by recognizing that believers themselves are the temple of the Holy Spirit and *incorporates the idea of embodied theology*. We believe that it’s the gathered assembly who becomes the living dwelling place of God through the Word and the Spirit. Therefore, **it’s not the place of our meeting that matters, but how that space expresses the spiritual reality of our communion in Christ that makes our shared space sacred.**

To think about this requires understanding how our meeting spaces express and facilitate the sacred things of the assemble Church. A small Christian community might gather around a physical table with the Lord’s Supper serving as the central focal point of the service. The table isn’t sacred, but observing the Lord’s Supper together is. The bread and the cup proclaims Jesus’ sacrifice, and it’s in the fellowship meal that believers share together that we participate in the love of his sacrifice. So the table visually expresses that Christ himself is the center of the Church and facilitates the unity of the church gathered together around the table.

For larger communities, the table might be symbolized by the arrangement of the congregation to reflect the table. The Lord’s Supper still serves as the sacred focal point of the service, with fellowship flowing naturally from it, but the layout of the space changes. Seating might be set in a circle to imitate a shared table, reflecting the fellowship of believers who belong to one another. Or, for even larger groups, seating might focus on a symbolic table. Put simply, worship spaces don’t make the Church holy, but rather, their arrangement expresses and facilitates the sacred spiritual realities of the assembled body.

This principle is important to guard the Church from idolizing their spaces on the one hand, or becoming irreverent about what their spaces express on the other. The Church historically struggled with blurring the lines between icons and idols. But the reforming Church reacted by becoming irreverent about her worship spaces. We believe that there is value in being intentional about how our meeting spaces reflect and facilitate our sacred activities. Simplicity in the physical environment serves the goal of faithfulness, avoiding distraction, while modest visual elements like a physical Bible, a table cross or crucifix, the bread and cup, candles, or other meaningful symbols drawn from the history of the Church may serve as reminders that we gather in continuity with the one, holy, universal Church across all generations. None of these elements are understood as creating holiness, but they can help orient the heart toward the presence of God and the reality of the gospel when properly used.

Home churches benefit from thinking through their meeting spaces to create spaces that reflect our sacred spiritual realities.

Our Porch Design

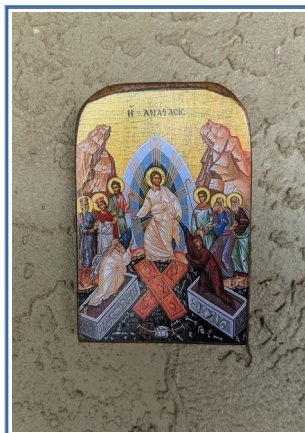
We meet on our porch in our small apartment. Home churches don't need a large house. And we've carefully designed the layout of our porch as an embodied theology, bringing every member into participation with the ancient truths, remembering that the Church was designed as the pillar and foundation of truth.

The icon of Christ the True Vine visually proclaims the Church's living union with Christ. Drawing from John 15:1-5 (CSB), the image depicts Christ as the vine from whom the apostles grow as branches, expressing that the life of the Church flows from communion with him. The icon teaches that the Church is not merely an institution or voluntary association, but a living body whose vitality comes from remaining in Christ through faith, obedience, and love. The presence of the apostles emphasizes continuity with the apostolic gospel preserved in Scripture, reminding the Church that her life is nourished through the Word delivered once for all



to the saints. And it symbolizes that the branches are pruned by the Father so that they may bear fruit, reminding us that, though there are many branches, the judgment of God begins with his own household, so we must keep his Word. The image also properly symbolizes the parable of the Mustard Tree: there are many branches, but one tree. No one branch is the whole tree, yet all the branches share in the whole life of the tree. So, this icon expresses that the one universal Church includes believers across traditions and generations who remain rooted in Christ and shaped by his Word. The placement of the Bible beneath the icon reinforces that Christ continues to govern his Church through the apostolic Scriptures, which serve as the enduring witness to his life and teaching.

The icon of the Resurrection presents Christ's victory over sin, death, and the grave as the foundation of the Church's hope and life. In the traditional Anastasis image, Christ stands upon the shattered gates of Hades, lifting Adam and Eve from their tombs, symbolizing the renewal of humanity through his triumph. The resurrection is therefore shown not only as an event concerning Jesus alone, but as the beginning of the new creation in which humanity is restored to fellowship with God.



The gathered figures surrounding Christ represent the continuity of God's saving work across generations, expressing that the Church participates in a story that spans all of redemptive history. Placing the Lord's Supper beneath this icon visually connects the Church's shared meal with the future wedding feast of the kingdom of God, reminding believers that each gathering anticipates the restoration of all things.



The table serves as the central visual focal point of the gathering, expressing that Christ himself is the source of the Church's unity and fellowship. In the bread and the cup, believers proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and participate together in the new covenant established through his sacrifice. The shared meal that flows from the Lord's Supper demonstrates that Christian fellowship is rooted in Christ's love and is sustained by his grace. The table reminds the Church that her life begins not with human effort but with divine mercy, and that believers are joined together as one body through the saving work of Christ. Its central placement communicates that the Church gathers first to receive from Christ before she goes into the world as witnesses of his kingdom.

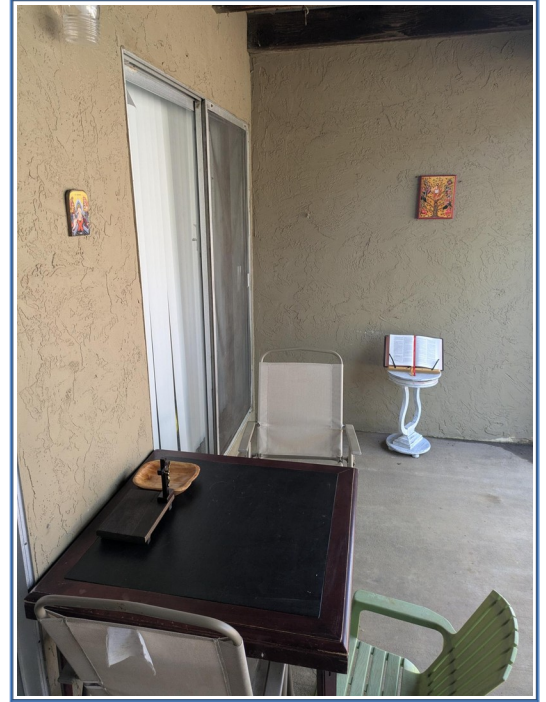


The presence of the Bible within the worship space expresses that Jesus Christ exercises his authority over the Church through the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures bear witness to Christ, preserve the apostolic gospel, and instruct the Church in truth that accords with godliness. The placement of the Bible visibly communicates that the Church does not create her own message but receives the faith once delivered to the saints. In this way, the Scriptures serve as both foundation and guide, correcting error, shaping discipleship, and forming the Church in holiness and love. The Bible's relationship to the table emphasizes that Christ feeds his people both sacramentally and through the Word, nourishing the Church in truth and grace.



Candles scented with frankincense and myrrh serve as a modest sensory and visual reminder of the saving work of Christ revealed in his incarnation, sacrificial death, and resurrection. Frankincense has historically symbolized prayer and priestly worship, while myrrh is associated with Christ's burial, together recalling the gifts presented to Jesus at his birth and pointing to the purpose of his coming. The gentle presence of light reflects the confession that Christ is the light of the world who illumines his people through the Holy Spirit. These elements do not create holiness but serve as quiet visual reminders that the Church gathers in reverence, gratitude, and hope before the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

The arrangement of believers around the table expresses the shared participation of the Church in the life of Christ. Gathering face-to-face reflects the fellowship of believers who belong to one another as members of one body. This spatial form communicates that worship is not a performance observed by spectators but a shared participation in prayer, Scripture, communion, and mutual encouragement. The minister serves within the gathered body as one entrusted with the responsibility to teach and shepherd according to the Scriptures, reflecting Christ's headship while remaining subject to his authority. The flexible arrangement of seating allows the Church to welcome others while preserving the visible truth that Christ himself gathers his people, forms them in love, and sends them into the world.



Summary:

Home churches understand very well that the meeting space is not what makes our gathering holy. But this theology of worship-spaces tries to help us understand that our meeting spaces should embody what does make us holy. None of these symbols are sacred in themselves. Our arrangement is not a prescribed holy order. But these symbols and the intentionality of how we meet reflects what is sacred. So I hope this short theology of worship-spaces may be helpful to others who are trying to think through how to do church in their home.

Real Questions: Real Answers

Because the Church is both gathered and sent, the worship space remains integrated with ordinary life. The home reminds us that discipleship is lived daily in faith and love, while the worship space reminds us of the work of Christ, our high heavenly calling, and our unshakable hope to come. In this way, the place of gathering becomes not a retreat from life, but a setting in which believers are formed to live as the people of God in the world.

Thus the arrangement of space serves the life of the Church by visibly expressing the gospel: Christ gathers his people, Christ feeds his people, Christ teaches his people, Christ forms his people in love, and Christ sends his people into the world.

Home churches should think through these realities to create spaces that reflect our sacred spiritual realities.

This section sets out to answer important questions.

Are icons idols?

Icons are two-dimensional images and symbols that reflect deeper spiritual meaning. They are not always familiar to Christians from the Protestant or Evangelical world, but they can be an effective means of focusing the symbolism and attention of the gathered assembly.

We believe that icons are not idolatrous so long as they do not become the object of those things that belong to God. When they become a source of division or receive what belongs to God, then they must be removed because they've assumed an improper place.

This is why we've taken the time to write down a theology of worship spaces, and will continue to develop it over time, because it's important to be clear about why we do what we do. Anything that does not rightly build up the body must be removed. But nothing that does rightly benefit the body should be withheld.

May all God's people have clear and right discernment in their times and their contexts about these things.

Is having an altar for communion idolatrous?

A communion altar may refer to any table or raised platform where the bread and cup are set apart. Many traditions locate the altar at the front of the assembly, and participants will walk forward to receive the bread and the cup from the altar. Others set the bread and cup on a table, and deacons will distribute the bread and cup throughout the assembly. The communion altar is not where the sacrifice is made because the cross was the altar upon which Christ's sacrifice was made, once for everyone. But it can be the place where the bread and cup are set apart and the sacred act of the Church partaking of the Lord's Supper is focused and symbolized. In this sense, there is nothing idolatrous about the Lord's table or altar. But, where the altar becomes more than it ought, then it should be changed so that it is restored to its proper place.

How can we bring a sense of the sacred to a very lived-in-space like a small apartment or home?

One misconception about home churches is that one must have a proper house. This is not true. All one needs is enough space for everyone to sit. You can bring a sense of the sacred to very small spaces in meaningful ways. We have designed our space around the table. If we grow, we will try to reflect the table in the design of our layout.

To help us retain a sense of the sacred we have designed our space carefully. We have a small wooden platform on our table that holds the bread and the cup, which are set apart from the rest of the meal (to be taken separately with intention). Between the bread and the cup is a small crucifix, which reminds us of the bread's and the cup's true meaning. Behind the crucifix is the Orthodox "icon of the resurrection", which anticipates the victory of the cross. These small symbols bring a sense of the sacred by focusing our mind on what really is sacred.

We also hang the Orthodox "icon of the vine" on the wall in front of our table, reminding us that we are but one branch of the vine, which draws its life from Christ, who sustains and nourishes us. This was purposefully selected to help us remember that we are connected by faith and practice to the one, universal, and apostolic Church. Although we do not belong to any one denomination, we nonetheless belong to Christ along with all other believers from across all the branches of the Christian tree. This reminds us that we are not trying to do something new, but instead, and trying to do something very old; we are anchored to the historic faith and practice of the Church.

These little touches work for us in our space. We do not have any members who are made to stumble by any of these things. And part of our vision is to be firmly anchored to the broader, historic Church. So we wanted to include things that are meaningful to that vision. But other churches have other needs. The point is that they should think carefully about how they can design a space that expresses the sacred life of the Church.