

The image shows the interior of a modern church sanctuary. The room is filled with rows of dark wood pews with white seats, arranged in a semi-circular pattern. At the front of the sanctuary, there is a large, light-colored screen or projection area. The walls are light-colored, and there are large windows, including a prominent arched window. The ceiling is white with recessed lighting and several pendant lights hanging down. The overall atmosphere is clean, bright, and modern.

THE BUILDING

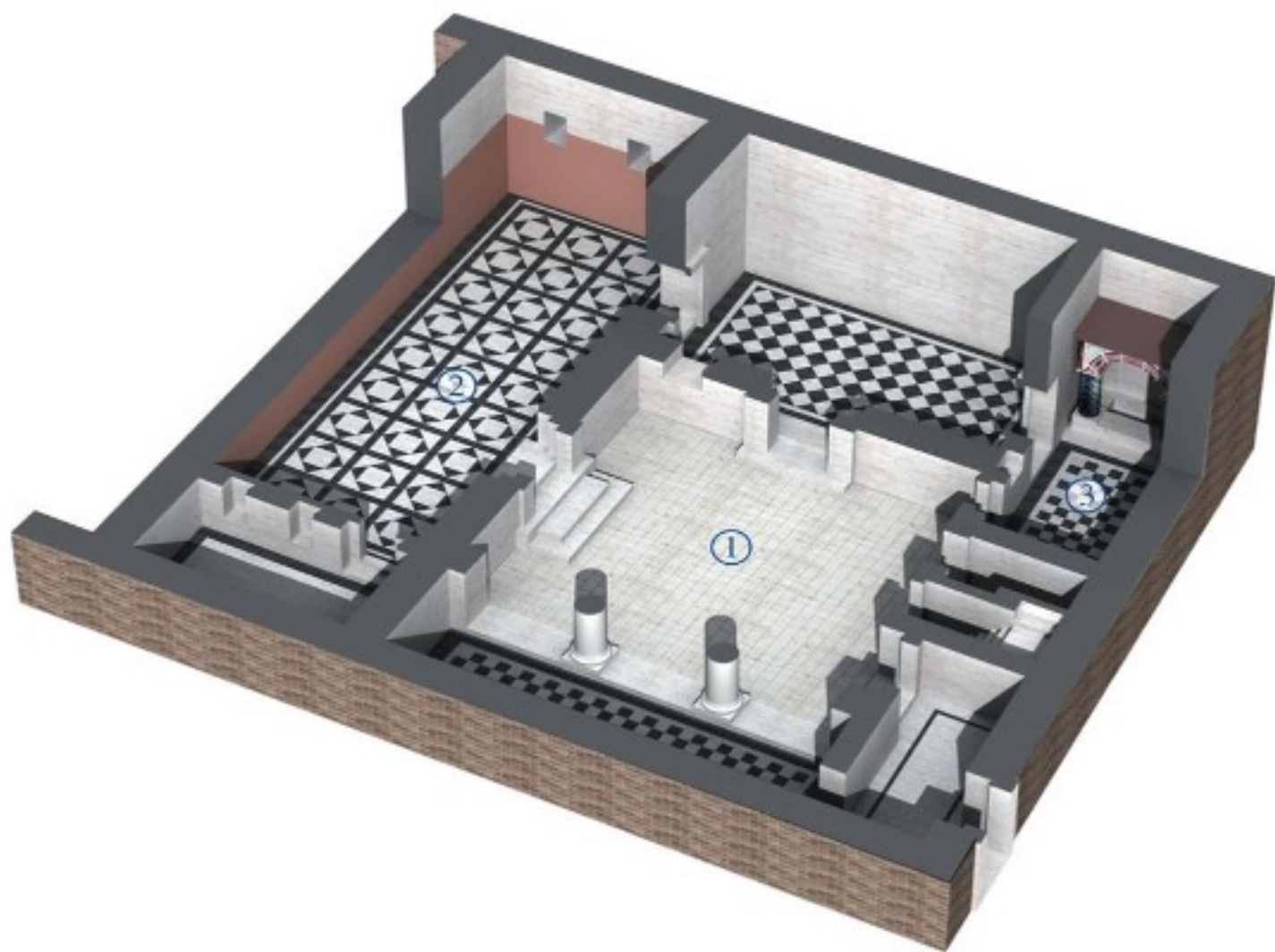
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

- There seems to be two extremes when it comes to problems related to “church buildings” – some argue we shouldn’t have them at all, while others want to make them as elaborate and multi-purpose as possible. Essentially, it’s total prohibition vs. elaborate excess.
- So, how can we justify our own facility? Where is the scriptural authority for it and how do we know where the line has been drawn?
- This lesson is especially pertinent given two realities faced at East Shelby. First, a constant need to find solutions to our “space problem.” And second, the age of the building and the upkeep (that isn’t free).

DURA-EUROPOS

Located in Syria, it was a residence until it was converted for religious use between 233-256 AD.





AUTHORITY TO MEET

- Local churches are commanded in the New Testament to meet regularly for various activities. Clearly, several of these functions can only take place on the first day of the week while gathered as a congregation (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:1-2, 11:18ff, Heb. 10:25).
- If a church is commanded to gather together, there is authority (necessarily implied) for a PLACE to meet. While James does not mention what kind of place this is, it is obvious in James 2:1ff that the church does meet SOMEWHERE (it is indoors, there are places to sit, it is a location that is acknowledged and known even by outsiders). Throughout the Roman Empire, local churches met in places that could be similarly identified.
- Is there a pattern in the New Testament that can be established?

THE TEMPLE COMPLEX

The church in Jerusalem initially met for worship and teaching in the temple complex, a facility that encompassed approximately 20 acres (Acts 2:46). When it was either necessary or convenient, they also conducted teaching in homes (Acts 5:42). This was a huge church (several thousand at its peak), and grew continuously (Acts 6:1). Notice that growth was not seen as a negative thing (as the “house church” proponents often argue). Church size and rapid growth brought challenges, but the church in Jerusalem seemed very intent on oneness, fellowship, and sticking together (Acts 4:4, 4:32, 6:7).

OTHER FACILITIES

- The early Christians frequently met in homes (1 Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Rom. 16:5). For small groups, often persecuted by their local communities, this was the most expedient way to go about worshiping and teaching together.
- Christian groups sometimes met in synagogues, at least initially (Acts 19:8).
- When it was necessary, disciples rented or borrowed public facilities, such as a school house in Ephesus (Acts 19:9-10). This arrangement seemed to be a good long term solution for the Christians in Ephesus.
- Obviously, where there is no pattern to be found, there is no pattern to be bound!

RESTRICTIONS?

- The lack of a pattern does not give permission for us to use a building for anything or to just build whatever we want. Whatever facility we choose to use must still be used for scriptural purposes. If a building is indeed just an expedient (something that helps us do scriptural work), then all of its components or accoutrements must not violate other concepts or commands in scripture.
- The scriptural work of the church is: limited benevolence for other Christians only (Philippians 4:15), edification and admonishment (1 Thessalonians 5:14), Biblical education (Titus 2:1-8, 2 Timothy 2:2), fellowship in worship (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), the spreading of the Gospel, and the support of preachers and missionaries (2 Corinthians 11:7-9, 3 John 5-10).
- Does our facility meet those needs?

The image shows the interior of a highly ornate church, likely a Baroque or Rococo style. The central focus is a large, gilded altar with a complex relief sculpture. On either side, there are smaller altars with blue and gold decorations and religious paintings. The ceiling is a masterpiece of Baroque stucco work, featuring intricate scrollwork and several circular medallions with religious scenes. The architecture is characterized by deep arches and a sense of dramatic, vertical space. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the stone, wood, and gold leaf.

WHAT ABOUT EXCESS?

SOME FINAL OBSERVATIONS

- The church is not the building.
- “Place” holds value. God understands the emotional connections we make, and the sentimentality we attach to places. A casual reading of the Old Testament proves this (note the special attachment God and His people had to certain mountains, cities, rivers, valleys, even to the Promised Land, in general). So it’s okay for a building to be special to us, just in its proper context (Psalm 84).
- Buildings can be a reflection of a community’s values. Not always, to be sure, but architecture matters more than we might know (see Haggai).
- Our goal is to do something huge and grand for God, but not with bricks and stones. No, we are building up the church (1 Cor. 3:10ff, Eph. 2:19–22).