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### Sound Sanctuary

#### What's the Use?

by Richard Rutherford

In defining clients' needs there are always myriad technical and aesthetic opinions to be dealt with. I would like to say that some of these points might not have ever been brought up at all if one major point had been clearly outlined from day one: "What are we doing in this room?"

We always loosely use the term "sanctuary" as the general term for that big room where worship and teaching takes place. More and more often it may simply be referred to as the "Worship Center" or some other generic term that may more correctly leave room for creative uses of a space prone to changing needs. The reason I bring this up at all is because the evolving methodologies of teaching spirituality require forethought and insight into evolving technologies that will keep appropriate pace with cultural evolutions.

I say this, knowing full well there are arguments on both sides of the issue when it comes to the modern emerging "church" and "cutting-edge" approaches. (Dan Kimball's book, titled *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, is interesting reading for those so inclined.)

There are other facets to this issue, including the plummeting average age of pastoral staff these days, and this particular generational/cultural shift and assumptive approach to "the digital age" is beginning to really impact House of Worship architecture as a whole. Eddy Hall, a senior consultant at Living Stone Associates, points to all of this as just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to developing a "church" facility. His firm, along many others, are beginning to view churches as living organisms, not just physical structures. This may seem a little esoteric at first, but this viewpoint is most clear when stating that the building is just a building; it's the people and their faith that make it a church.

I really believe that without first acknowledging the root values, teachings and personalities involved in any church project, we may at times inadvertently do disservice to the core efforts of a given group of faithful followers.

This could happen by overshooting or undershooting the technical requirements. It can't be stressed enough how important the biblical principle of being in a relationship really is when it comes to working with Houses of Worship. I say this for the benefit of contractors, consultants and "media pastors" who amazingly seem to assume that this has little or nothing to do with building a good audio system. I think they're wrong.

It's not about how many channels the FOH console should have, it's about the willingness to discover how many volunteers are on staff, what they know and how much training you can provide them. It's not about the size of the video screen, it's about who is running the

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PowerPoint programming, and how lovingly they were trained.

Okay, so this is not a particularly “technical” article, but the fundamental elements of spiritual context too often get overlooked in developing relationships in this particular marketplace. The very nature of the finished product demands extra effort and focus on the parts of both client and vendor.

So, back to the question, “What’s the use?” Faithfully leaping into defining the space and its specific uses can only give better technical results, and more grateful clients. The less-than-perfect results I’ve ever personally encountered were born from a lack of willingness to let the relationship and the human details be organic. While I am always adamant about the math and physics of audio, these are typically the only trusted constants in the equation. While it may sound like the rest of the process is some sort of “warm and fuzzy” immeasurable intangible, it doesn’t need to be quite that way. All the fundamental requirements of good organization, technical research, budgeting and construction planning are still required. But the price of shortsightedness will be high in regard to missing the very core of why the work is required in the first place. Personally, when it comes to the final job inspector, I want all my connections marked clearly.

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