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Community

Acoustics tune up church's sound

\$500,000 renovation project amplifies best asset: a cappella singing of congregation.

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Steven Bruce, worship and outreach minister at North Central Church of Christ, leads the praise team's rehearsal in the newly revamped sanctuary. The church spent \$500,000 to expand the stage and baptismal behind Bruce.

With the help of a consultant from All Church Sound in Chicago and a Carmel architect, the sanctuary was transformed throughout 2004. The flat-walled room, which had dead spots for sound, 1960s window coloring, off-white walls and uncomfortable pews, is now a modern worship space, said David Mangum, senior minister.

The concert-hall-style acoustics come from rounded panels on every wall and the arc ceiling. They are staggered so the sound diffuses, making the congregation of 300 sound like it could be 600 strong, Bruce said.

"It's one of those rooms where we don't know all the potential yet," Bruce said. "I've sung in hundreds of churches, and this has the best acoustics."

The project had its skeptics, but Bruce said now he has heard nothing but good feedback.

"People can hear harmony," said David Mangum, senior minister. "The sounds aren't absorbed anymore. I can't believe the difference."

A new light bluish-gray color also covers the walls of the wood stage and a decorated glass mural behind the now-visible baptismal. Two large screens were installed for projection and new movable pews are set in a semicircle.

Architect Bob Hindman said the engineering makes it as perfect as the sound of Clowes Hall at Butler University.

"It's a whole different approach for sound," Hindman said. "It's different because there is nothing in town where they're focusing on sound."

Hindman took the ideas from All Church Sound and created the new worship space.

WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP -- Singing a cappella sets this church apart. Step into the North Central Church of Christ sanctuary and listen to the sound, but don't mistake it for a performance hall.

That's exactly what the staff had in mind when the recently completed \$500,000 renovation project, the second in a two-phase project, that was dedicated in August, said Steven Bruce, worship and outreach minister.

"We are unique in congregational singing is all a cappella," Bruce said. "We wanted to capitalize on something we're unique in."

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"So many have sound problems, just like my church," Hindman said. "The little flat panels you see everywhere don't really do the job."

Hindman also wanted to glorify the baptismal so everyone could see it.

"Every (baptismal) has a little bathtub in the back," he said. "I wanted it to be different."

The approach seems to be working. Pastors said the church is growing and members can't get enough.

Orville and Dixie Bose enjoy the sanctuary on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings.

He likes the softer look and the more comfortable seating. He also said the moveable furniture makes the room adaptable to events such as weddings.

"The singing is wonderful, and the acoustics are wonderful," Dixie said. "I love that mural, and the bigger stage makes everything more visible."

Go online

Learn about the new acoustics at North Central Church of Christ, 9015 Westfield Blvd., by checking the Web site of the consultant that oversaw the construction: http://www.allchurchsound.com/ACS/projects/nccoc_in.html

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