

Excellence in Unusual Places

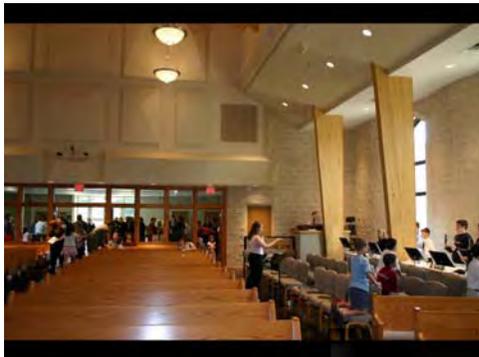
Additional photos

(This article supplements the March 2007 issue of [Worship the Lord.](#))

A unique feature in the Dallas design is the dedicated area for musicians. In churches without balconies, it can be difficult to find ideal space for musicians. It may not work to put them in the back because of proximity to back walls, families with small children, or the volume of a blazing trumpet or brass quartet too close to those seating in rear pews.

It's not best to put the musicians up front. Whether or not they detract from focus on the symbols of the means of grace, they aren't able to function "liturgically" if they have to move to a singing position each time they sing. Such movement would be disruptive when singing a Verse of the Day, or alternating with the congregation on psalm or hymn verses, or singing during communion distribution.

Musicians in the Dallas design occupy their own special space running along much of the left wall. Note the handbell tables that allow people to see the handbells without putting them "front and center."



Functional space for musicians



Choir chairs in front of handbell tables

A newer WELS church in New Berlin, WI also has a excellent solution for musician space. See [NewBerlinFloorPlan.pdf](#).



*Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, WI – tiered musician area.
Organ and grand piano at left. Timpani visible below music stand at right.*

John Koelpin's article states: "During the planning stages for our new sanctuary, the architect invited the acoustic engineer to a meeting. His first question caught us off guard. (We were expecting him to address the "sound-absorbing" padded pews. It ends up they're really don't!) . . . "

There are several reasons why this church has good acoustics: lots of cubic volume, hard walls, and a stained concrete floor. For another example of a stained concrete floor, see: [Our Savior Lutheran, Houston](#).

Koelpin wrote:

The building, however, almost wasn't. Little did I know how difficult it could be to take a design on paper and actually build it with wood and stone. The building seemed to go up with ease. But when I asked the architect, in the afterglow following the dedication service, what he thought now that the building was finished, he said, "This was not an easy building to build." Then he showed me a few examples: places where three or four sections of drywall met at unusual angles, places where split-face block and the poured concrete met, and the joining of the new sanctuary with the old school. "But, he said, "you hired the best contractor. They didn't call us once to tell us they couldn't build what we had drawn."



Complex corners, angles, curves



Finished view of complex design / sound dispersing angles enhance acoustics

Koelpin wrote:

[Our architects] perceived a desire for excellence and their suggestions moved us in those directions.... A wood ceiling instead of ceiling tile, stone walls instead of drywall, height to reinforce awe and reverence, and custom altar furnishings are a few of the ideas they gently pushed and persistently promoted.

Some photos of custom furnishings follow.



For additional input on excellence in worship, see the following resources at the Worship website: www.wels.net/worship. Share relevant copies with buildings and grounds committee or worship committee. Search under Articles on any keyword, or follow the hyperlinks.

- "Acoustics . . ." – Scott Riedel (three articles)
- ["Excellence in Worship"](#) – James Huebner
- ["Checklist for Improving Worship Environment"](#) – Wayne Schulz
- ["Sermon: Dedication of Seminary Organ"](#) – James Tiefel
It's not only about a pipe organ. Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Fall 1991, v 88#4

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