



# Growing Together

BY GREGORY A. DETOGNE

**Gateway Church is one of the fastest growing houses of worship in the United States.** Since the time when Pastor Robert Morris and other founding elders held the church's first service on Easter morning in 2000, the congregation has steadily grown in size from approximately 180 people to more than 20,000 by Easter of last year.

Serving the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex from a campus in North Richmond Hills, an extension in Frisco, Texas, and a third campus in Southlake, Texas, Gateway has risen to the challenges of accommodating its burgeoning numbers guided by a philosophy that places interpersonal human dynamics above everything else. "We're all about people," the church explains on its website.

"In the midst of all this exciting activity, we still recognize that the church's health is more important than numerical growth."

A product of strategic planning directed at meeting the needs of Gateway's ever-expanding congregation, a new 4,000-seat sanctuary built at the Southlake campus was opened late last year. Despite the huge volume of its soaring interior and wide expanse of seating spread across a main floor and upper balcony, the room successfully preserves the sense of intimacy and tight-knit community that has long been part of the church's social fabric.

With overall building design managed by the Dallas offices of Beck Architecture,

Dallas-based Acoustic Dimensions was tasked with developing a comprehensive systems blueprint for the room that addressed acoustics, audio, video, lighting, theatrical rigging, and broadcast functions. Serving as the interface between the church, its budget, the project schedule, and all concerns for quality of the highest order was Gateway's own Executive Director of Campus Development, Doug Sluiter. Complementing Sluiter's role was Gateway Executive Director of Technical Arts David Leuschner, the person most directly responsible for helping to define and implement the technical requirements of the project.

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**“We settled on single manufacturers for nearly all of our equipment, because long-term this is going to save us money.”**

—David Leuschner, Executive Director of Technical Arts, Gateway Church, Southlake, TX

## Bigger doesn't mean distant at Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas

“We settled on single manufacturers for nearly all of our equipment,” says Leuschner. “We use all Meyer loudspeakers, all Martin lighting, all Digico mixing consoles. Why? Because long-term this is going to save us money on equipment repairs [and] training of volunteers with similar equipment in all rooms. A lot of churches fall into the immediate cheap route and don't understand that spending a little more on consistent equipment and manufacturers will save money in the long run.”

Leading the charge on the AV installation side was Miami-based Pro Sound and Video. The Dallas arm of Barbizon stepped in to deftly manage installation of the theatrical lighting, while the Las Vegas offices of Stage

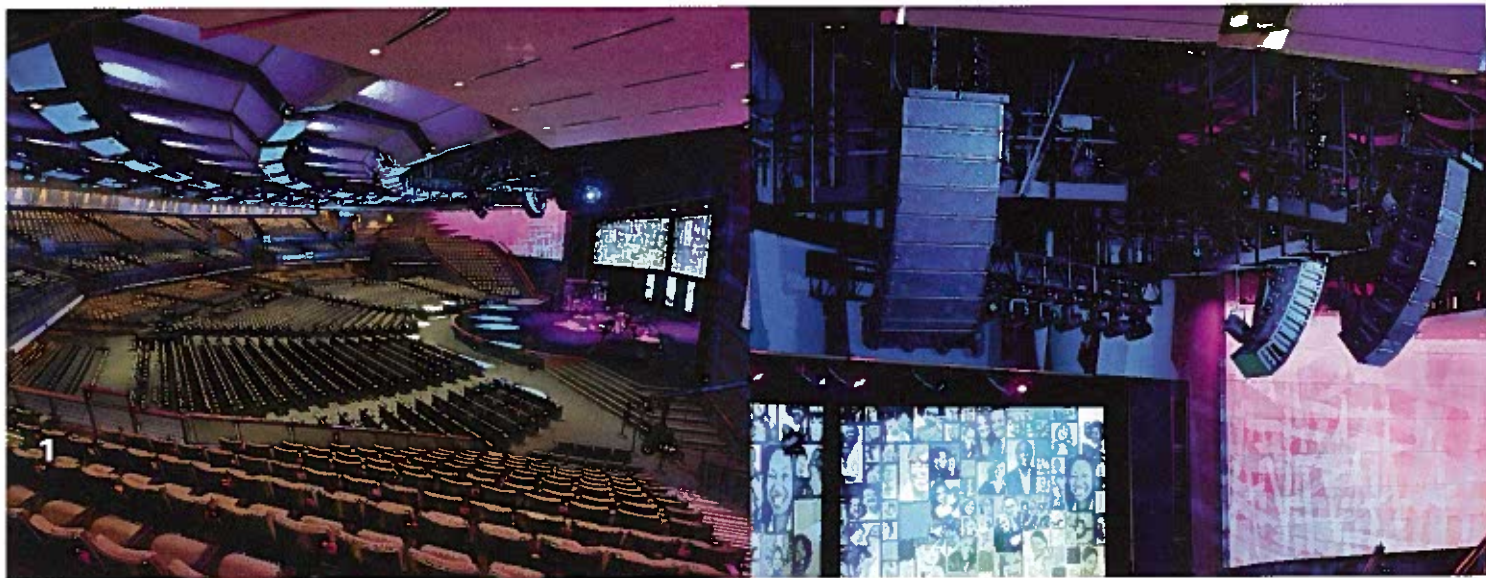
Technologies crafted the rigging scheme. Beck TV installed all video production equipment related to the church's broadcast.

“On both technical and architectural levels, the room was built to enhance high production values and system responsiveness,” says Robert Rose, a senior consultant with Acoustic Dimensions. “Just like that found within the church itself, there was a binding sense of community among all of us working on the project. This led to holistic integration of the room design, with everything working together as part of the whole. Despite its size, the room feels incredibly connected. It occupies a tight, rectangular footprint without making the congregation feel as if they were in a box. Just because the space



**1** Despite the soaring expense of Gateway's new 4,000-seat Southlake location, the room successfully preserves the sense of intimacy and community that is part of the church's social fabric.

**2, 3** Gateway relies on a trio of Digico SD7 digital audio mixing consoles. SD7's are used for mixing front-of-house (photo 3), monitors (photo 2) and in the audio production suite.



**“The size of the space—especially the width of the room—definitely worked against us in terms of a stereo design.”** —Robert Rose, Senior Consultant, Acoustic Dimensions, Dallas, TX

is bigger than anything they’ve worshipped in before doesn’t mean there has to be a sense of distance between everybody and everything. Our goal was to maintain the intimacy the church has always enjoyed, even within this much larger environment.”

#### MATTERS OF SOUND

Acoustics play a large role in humanizing the large scale of the sanctuary, with panels designed to return the sonic energy of the singing congregation that would otherwise be lost into the high ceiling above.

The sound system itself plays an additional part in making this big space significantly less imposing. During the design phase, the project team wrestled with what made the most audio sense for the room. A plan ultimately emerged that brought a mono system to the space using left, center, and right curvilinear arrays, each comprising eight Milo high-power, four-way cabinets and one Milo 120 cabinet from Meyer Sound serving as a downfill.

“What motivated us in creating these arrays was a desire to obtain the most uniform coverage possible along with consistent tonal balance,” Rose relates.

Once the crew from Pro Sound and Video completed the audio install, the resulting performance met expectations and then some. Lacking stereo separation within the wide area of coverage, the monaural arrays bring predictable and even coverage to every seat in the house in a fashion not dominated by an exclusively left, right, or center image. Regardless of where you’re seated, sound is localized to the platform uniformly.

“The size of the space—especially the width of the room—definitely worked against us in terms of a stereo design,” adds Rose. “The area of coverage we were faced with on the horizontal plane was so great that we would have simply left a lot of people listening to only the right, left, or center array directly in front of them. Going mono solved all that nicely.”

**1** Considering the width of the room, a mono system provided the best opportunity for uniform coverage and consistent tonal balance.

**2** Gateway uses Meyer loudspeakers throughout its new Southlake location. The system in the main auditorium consists of Meyer Milo and Milo 120 four-way curvilinear line array loudspeakers, with 700-HP subwoofers.

The Milo and Milo 120 cabinets in the house arrays are buttressed at the low-end by 700-HP dual 18-inch subwoofers also selected from the Meyer Sound catalog. Self-powered across the board, all Meyer Sound components used on the project house their own power supplies and control/processing electronics.

Four-way in configuration, the Milo cabinets are remarkably compact given their output: 140 dB SPL peak, with flat phase and frequency response extending up to 18 kHz. Built expressly to expand the coverage of

Milo arrays, the Milo 120 shares the same dimensions and rigging points as those of a standard Milo enclosure. The Meyer subs within the Gateway blueprint are ground-stacked at each side of the proscenium, along with self-contained Meyer CQ-1 wide coverage mains. Since the system is mono, these left-right CQ-1s can be used as needed to create wider side separation, or to localize effects to one of three large-screen displays. Dwelling under the platform, additional subs bring extended low frequencies to areas needing it directly down the center of the main floor.

Front-of-house mixing, as well as that needed onstage for a house in-ear system and in the sanctuary's audio production suite, is managed by a trio of Digico SD7 consoles. Supporting up to 1,392 I/O connections, 48 stereo effects units, and 32 graphic EQs, the mixing surfaces are fiber-connected to the same engines residing onstage and all use one set of stage boxes to share inputs and eliminate the need for a passive mic split.

Leuschner is quick to point out that the MADi-based digital audio network allows the church to transfer (send and receive) a massive number of audio channels around their new facility, and between different facilities.

Facilitating "virtual pastor" feeds to its other locations as well as broadcast and archival functions, a pair of production control rooms was incorporated into Gateway's new Southlake sanctuary floor plan. Within the control room real estate allotted to video production, all switchers and control positions are found. Inside an adjacent video engineering room connected via a sliding glass door is all the required terminal gear plus components for routing, switching, and processing between facilities and the outside world. Sony was the main provider of video production gear; the manufacturer's MVS-8000 multi-format switcher/proces-

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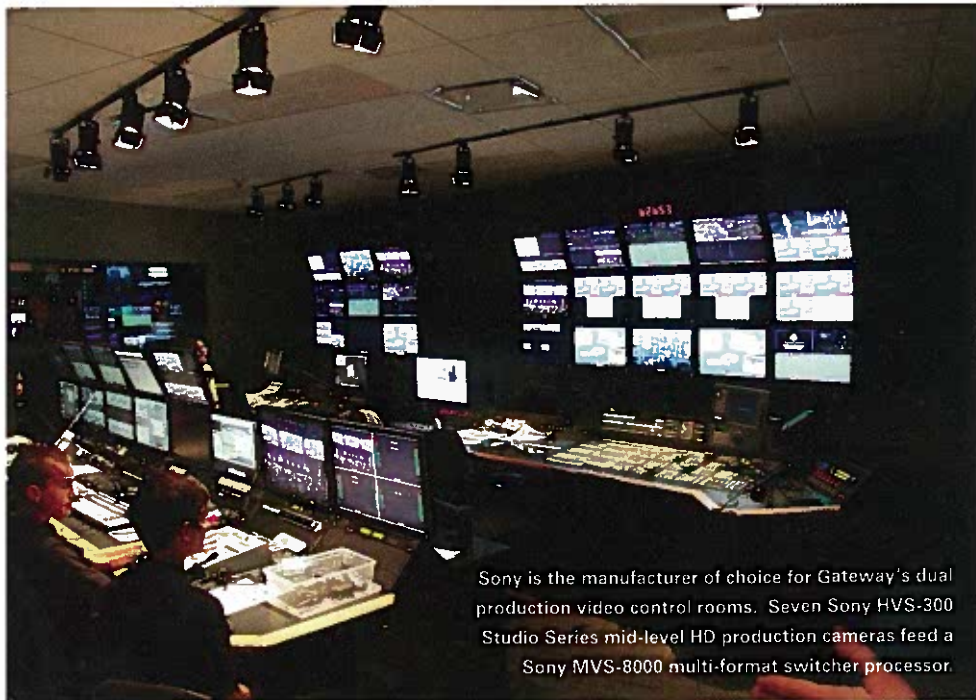
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Sony is the manufacturer of choice for Gateway's dual production video control rooms. Seven Sony HVS-300 Studio Series mid-level HD production cameras feed a Sony MVS-8000 multi-format switcher processor.

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sor serves as the backbone of the overall system, which gathers and manipulates input with the aid of seven Sony HSC-300 cameras.

The EVS delay recording system has an "always record" technology that helps the church with the ability to go back and select the right shots for their live feeds to the other campuses. The EVS system is very easy to train volunteers to operate, according to Leuschner.

While technology is important at Gateway Church, it is important that distractions don't obscure from the message. "We completely strike our worship set in under two minutes [before the message]," Leuschner continues. "A full sermon set is rolled on during the video commercial announcements. We consider it very important to have a sermon without distractions." This is a concept he says conveys to small- and medium-sized churches as well. "[Smaller

churches] may not be able to clear out their worship set, but dressing the stage so that it's clean, neat so the sermon/teaching portion of the services is delivered without distraction is very important, especially in a church atmosphere," he adds.

The technical budget for Gateway's Southlake sanctuary project was reportedly around \$8 million dollars. "The really exciting thing about this job was the way it never ceased to evolve," Rose confides on a final note. "Everyone put their heart and soul into it, and maintained a creative mind when it came to achieving our goals. The results, based upon the evidence, offer more than we dreamed possible today, with plenty of room left over to grow for tomorrow."

**GREGORY A. DETOGNE** is a freelance writer and publicist who has served the pro audio industry for the past 30 years.