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Meyer Sound Brings Glad Tidings to Tucson Church

Inspiration is often found in unexpected places. When Pastor Steve Hilton and his brother Shaun attended the annual School at the Phoenix First Assembly of God in Phoenix, Ariz., last winter, they did not suspect that it would lead them to solving the ongoing audio problems plaguing their church. But that's exactly what happened when attendees of the three-day workshop were invited to experience Phoenix First Assembly's self-powered Meyer Sound MILO® high-power curvilinear array loudspeaker system.

It was at this point that Hilton met Will Lewis, owner of Conceptual Engineering in Scottsdale, Ariz., who had been instrumental in Phoenix First Assembly's choice of the Meyer Sound system and its installation. Hilton was impressed with what he heard and engaged Lewis in conversation about it. Lewis soon learned that Hilton's church, the Glad Tidings Assembly of God in Tucson, Ariz., had ongoing issues of their own with sound quality that they wanted to address. Lewis wanted to help.

Like many houses of worship, the Glad Tidings church in Tucson was not designed with sound in mind. Constructed in 1972, the main auditorium is basically a long, low rectangle, roughly 80 feet long by 53 feet wide, with a gently sloping ceiling that's only 13 feet at its highest point. Furthermore, the ceiling and walls are all highly reflective sheetrock, and the sound booth was located at the very back of the hall. The existing audio system consisted of speakers on floor stands that were too loud for those sitting close and lacking intelligibility for those further back. All in all, an unsatisfying situation.

"After we heard the line array in Phoenix, we wanted to upgrade, but it was a stretch for us. We wanted to get the best bang for the buck, to make it last for a long time and have really good quality sound," says Hilton. "So we took four or five bids and looked at all the options." The goal for the system was to create cohesive, high fidelity sound with even levels throughout the room, while remaining visually non-intrusive and harmonious with the décor.

In Conceptual Engineering's bid Lewis proposed investing in audio gear rather than construction, specifying a system based on self-powered Meyer Sound M1D ultra-compact curvilinear array loudspeakers and M1D-Sub ultra-compact subwoofers. The Hiltons judged Lewis' proposal to be the best solution and awarded him the job.

As he had for Phoenix First Assembly, Lewis turned to Meyer Sound's MAPP Online Pro™ acoustical prediction program to help him design a system with the most even and effective coverage. The resulting design called for flying three M1D ultra-compact curvilinear array loudspeakers over each side of the podium, canted in slightly to keep sound from reflecting off the side walls.

“I was aware of their budgetary concerns right from the beginning,” says Lewis. “I didn't know if I could get by with six M1Ds, but MAPP Online showed me that I could and gave me the ability to show them I could do it, too. It's such a great visual aid.”

Lewis used a SIM® 3 audio analyzer to help him match the sound quality between the seating area and the mix position, located on a raised platform at the center of the back wall. “From an audio viewpoint, the mix position is really in the worst possible spot, so I brought in my SIM 3 and took traces from nine microphone positions in the pew areas,” explains Lewis. “I tried to focus mainly on the center, to have that SIM trace match the trace from the front-of-house position as closely as possible.”

Lewis flew two M1D-Sub subwoofers over the center of the stage, rather than flying one with each M1D cluster. “I learned the center subwoofer technique at two different Meyer Sound seminars. It gives you a nice, even low-frequency lobe and eliminates phase cancellation. If you look at it in MAPP, it's really amazing how prominently you can see it.”

The church also reduced the amount of sound being put into the room. The 9-piece praise band moved to in-ear monitors, the drummer switched to an electronic drum kit, and all amplifiers were eliminated – even for Hilton, who plays electric bass with the group. That left only the choir. To provide monitors for them, Lewis hung a pair of UPM-1P ultra-compact wide coverage loudspeakers from the ceiling and aimed them directly downward at the group, thus minimizing spill into the house mix.

Glad Tidings purchased their Meyer Sound products online from Northern Sound & Light (McKees Rocks, Penn.), and engaged Conceptual Engineering to supervise the actual installation. As a final cost-saving touch, the Hiltons supplied their own labor for the job. “It really was sweat equity,” notes Lewis with a chuckle. “The deal was that I would do the design, commission the system and oversee the install, and Steve and Shaun would be the crew. We used Unistrut up on the rafters to anchor the speaker hangs, and it was probably 120, 130 degrees in the attic. Steve would go up there and work for 15 minutes, come down dripping wet, drink a bunch of water, cool off a bit, and then go back up.”

Hilton feels the effort was well worthwhile. “We were looking at good quality sound as a long-term investment. For all the issues that we faced, Meyer Sound had a solution. The sound is great, the speakers themselves look really good, and we've had really positive comments from the congregation.”

Meyer Sound's main office and manufacturing facility are located in Berkeley, California, with field offices and authorized distributors located throughout the USA and around the world.

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