

# Church Production

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**heartland**  
A different way to do church

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**HEARTLAND COMMUNITY CHURCH, ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS**

A different way to do church



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Heartland Community Church in Rockford, Illinois offers seeker-sensitive, contemporary worship services where IMAG and eye-candy abound.

## CHURCH IN AMERICA'S HEARTLAND

### A different way to do church

By Alison Istnick

In the summer of 1998, an auspicious collection of 20 people attended the first meeting that would become Heartland Community Church (HCC) in Rockford, Illinois. Together, in a living room outfitted with a home VCR, a borrowed projector, and a set of speakers on sticks, the group worshipped under the leading of Heartland's Co-Founder and Lead Pastor, Doug Thiesen. Today Heartland serves 6,500 members and visitors who gather weekly to worship at what Thiesen and his Co-Founder, Heartland's Directional Leader, Mark Bankord, refer to as a "different way to do church." "To people on the outside looking in," notes Thiesen, "their first impression of a different way to do church is that our teaching message is via video."

Providing teaching through pre-recorded video is nothing new to Heartland. At the church's inception, Thiesen and Bankord approached Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, and asked if they would consider sharing with them Willow's archived collection of messages by various teaching pastors. Willow agreed. "Mark Bankord and I each brought our own unique contributions to the table," explains Thiesen, "but neither one of us has teaching gifts anywhere near the teaching pastors at Willow."



Three Da-lite screens, 11.5 feet by 20 feet each, span the front of Heartland's stage. Beneath the stage lies the control room that requires eight operators per service.



Visitors soon discover that Heartland is not just about video teaching. "We are about transformational teaching—teaching that is highly applicable to everyday life," says Thiesen. "The real uniqueness of a different way to do church," he adds, "is that we are committed to helping people discover their spiritual giftedness and then deploying them into the area of their spiritual gifts."

Heartland Community Church's believer-targeted, seeker-sensitive worship services offer upbeat and contemporary music enhanced with IMAG and lots of "eye candy." Heartland's "out of the box" concept for church was foundational in developing a style of service, propelled by technical-arts gifted staff and volunteers, that provides believers and seekers a seamless visual worship experience. With this history it's really no surprise that HCC's new 1,600-seat auditorium boasts a multi-million dollar A/V/L systems installation. This innovative approach to services combined with a drive for excellence has attracted the surrounding community. Just six months after opening their new facility, weekly attendance nearly doubled.

## The Church in the Mall

Rather than build on the church's existing 80-acre property, the land was sold and funds were used to purchase a declining 350,000 square-foot enclosed mall. In Decem-



Heart Community Church renovated a declining mall in Rockford, Illinois into their house of worship. Jands' Vista lighting console controls their extensive lighting system, and SLS line arrays are utilized for front-of-house audio.

*Photos courtesy of Jeff Dolphin.*



A Ross Video Synergy 3 switcher forms the heart of Heartland's video control room, with Miranda Kaleido-Alto-HD devices enabling fewer and larger plasma displays to take the place of numerous individual monitors.



ber of 2006 Heartland celebrated the completion of 150,000 square feet of remodeled space. The remaining area in the mall is still occupied by tenants. "You're not walking onto a church campus—you're walking into a mall and down the hall

into the auditorium," says Thiesen. "It has a great vibe—cool and contemporary, making it very comfortable."

A team deeply embedded in Heartland's mission led the project. Brent Hayes, HCC project leader and owner/president of SVL Productions located in Rockford, Illinois, also is a staffer at HCC serving as their technical director. SVL Productions was hired to provide the design/installation on each of Heartland's three venues: a 350-seat "chapel" type room, a 650-seat multi-purpose ministry room, and the main auditorium. While about 90% of the equipment installed into the two smaller venues was refreshed and reconfigured from their former facility, new equipment

and systems were designed into Heartland's premier facility: the main auditorium. "We will add more auditoriums as needed—rather than expand our existing room. We want stable formats that can easily be expanded to meet today's technology as well as the future's," says Hayes.

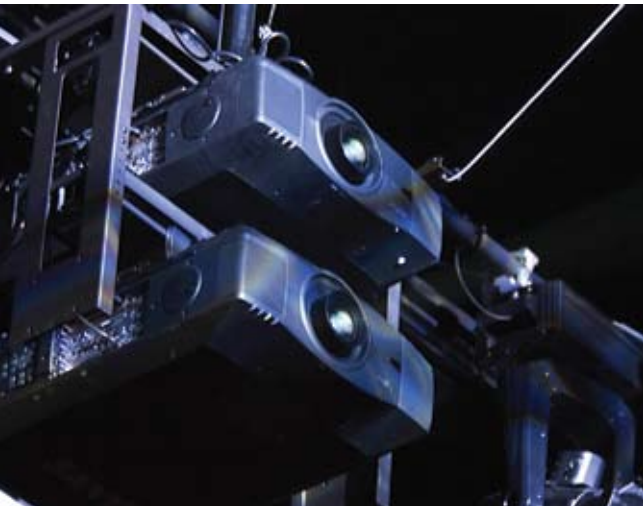
## Acoustics—Art and Function Meet

Before pen was put to paper, Hayes and his team had full access to the project's architect. This advantageous relationship allowed the two teams to develop architectural design elements to enhance acoustics within the room. "We worked closely with the architectural firm to ensure we not only had a room that looked great, but one that sounded great as well," says Hayes.



Sony CCUs (camera control units) provide the volunteer performing shading functions control over each camera's image quality, allowing them to adjust each image before it goes live.

Strikingly evident are the metal swooping clouds hung around the room's perimeter. The architects chose the design and Heartland selected surface materials: the perforation and what they were all backed with acoustically. Together with lapidary blankets flown high above the stage and additional wall panels, the total effect is



Double-stacked Sanyo PLV-HD150 projectors housed in Premier Mounts help to provide dynamic visual imagery on each of the three screens on Heartland's stage.

a room that is acoustically "as dead as we could get it," tells Hayes. To accommodate a main auditorium, the roof over the former department store retail space was raised 14 feet higher in three-quarters of the room. This was done to favor both camera angles and acoustics.

## A Seamless Video Experience

Constantly searching for new and fresh ways to present elements visually, Heartland invested wholeheartedly in the largest "nugget" of the installation—vid-

eo. "Because video teaching at Heartland has been a big deal since day one, enhancing the experience was a priority. We try to minimize a noticeable shift from the stage to the screens during the service," says Hayes.

Three Da-lite screens, 11.5 feet by 20 feet each, span the front of the stage. Each screen has double-stacked Sanyo PLV-HD150 projectors in a Premier Mounts stacker. On the back wall, a fourth screen employs a single Sanyo projector for prompter use. The main room is nicely outfitted with five Sony D50 cameras; three are set on tripods with the other two being controlled remotely using the Telemetrics CPS-ST-S studio control system.

Beneath the stage, on the lower level, is Heartland's state-of-the-art control room. During a typical service, eight operators are needed: switcher, director, assistant director, main graphics, graphics, two robotic cameras, camera shader, and tape operator. The Ross Video Synergy 3 switcher, "the room's centerpiece," is also used for all routing. "We opted not to buy an external router to save in cost, and instead use the Synergy's aux bus for this function," says Hayes. The monitor wall, chosen for both budgetary and space concerns, has six 50-inch Sampo PME-50x10 plasmas with three Miranda Kaleido-Alto-HDs providing tiling functions. A Clear-Com Eclipse Matrix system

Lab.gruppen audio amplifiers power the church's SLS loudspeakers; Shure wireless receivers share rack space in the amp room.

and a Clear-Com CellCom intercom system were chosen for communications. Hayes moved away from the traditional party-line system to one that allows point-to-point intercom communication.

Before moving into their new facility, a goal was set to offer extensive training to their 90%-volunteer tech team. Because of Heartland's close ties to Willow Creek, members of Willow's technical staff were also on hand to offer training and expertise with new equipment.

## Pristine Audio with a Kick

After auditioning several manufacturers' speaker systems, it became apparent that line arrays offered the best solution. "It was a unanimous decision to go with the SLS line array system. Because of the height that these speakers would be



hung, and downward tilt needed, conventional boxes were starting to separate so much that the pattern wasn't able to be maintained," says Hayes. "Overall, we were going for a very pristine sound, one that was capable of the SPL [sound pressure level] we needed and still maintained the clarity we wanted—for this the SLS ribbons were the perfect choice."

Heartland's Audio Director Joe Guarino (who is also president of Audio-Trak Sound Company of Rockford, Illinois) explains, "The church is not shy about getting the full impact from their music. A high number of boxes were needed to achieve very even room coverage." Those include four line arrays: two primary arrays with ten SLS LS9000 boxes each. Two smaller arrays of seven SLS LS6500 boxes each are used for side fill. The stage apron has nine SLS LS6500 front fill speakers and houses eight SLS 218EL double 18-inch sub cabinets.

Installed in the amp room underneath the stage in the basement—now the technology floor—are 24 Lab.gruppen C68:4 and seven C28:4 amplifiers. Musicians onstage rely on a personal Aviom monitoring system. The majority of mics used in the main venue are the Shure Wireless U Series capable of being networked for computer monitoring. Guarino selected the Shure U Series based on dependability, customer support, and because "the Shure's tonality maintains the character of the original wired version very well," says Guarino.

The FOH [front of house] audio console is an existing Crest V-12 56-channel mixing console moved from the former auditorium. Two Crest XR24 side car mixers were added to increase channel capacity



The church's lighting system was designed with flexibility in mind to accommodate HCC's ever-changing style of worship.

to more than 100. Cable runs to the stage are a combination of analog and digital. Heartland did install a "digital backbone" based on CobraNet for all distribution in the building. Audio routing to various rooms, such as the Apple Final Cut Pro editing suites and recording studios, is all digital over CobraNet.

## Extreme Versatility in Lighting

Key in achieving their "visual experience" is HCC's use of lighting. Heartland's primary vision for the room where its congregants meet each Sunday was "over-the-top" flexibility. "We were not shooting for a lot of expandability in our systems. I didn't need to allow for the addition of another 100 moving lights or 20 more cameras for the future. But we needed to allow for the fact that one day this could be a room full of moving lights, and the next day a room full of conventional lights," tells Hayes.

With Heartland's track record of "changing things up," the auditorium's lighting configuration both reflects and enables their innovative style. A favorite among Heartland's technical team is Jands' Vista lighting console platform. According to Hayes, a huge advantage is the console's operating environment, designed around a timeline concept as found in a video editing system, making it more volunteer friendly. "The ability to cross train volunteers to all three levels of lighting boards (a different model of the Vista console is installed in each of HCC's three venues) sold us on Jands," Hayes states. To showcase moving lights and color changes the church employs a Le Matric Radianc hazer.

The team opted to go with dimmer strips up in the ceiling—essentially what can be described as strips of high voltage track lighting. Heartland's Lighting Director Seth Thiesen (who is also the son of



Heartland took a unique approach to their weekly teaching—they import it via video. Messages from Willow Creek Community Church are used for the teaching portions of their service, while worship and other aspects are done live with IMAG (image magnification) support.



Lead Pastor Doug Thiesen) notes, "Above the stage and at FOH we have eight 100A three-phase Starline buss bars that serve as the distributed power network. You can clip in a breakout box—20A 120V, 20A 208V, or 20A three-phase 120/208—depending on your needs. So, anywhere I add a moving light I add a breakout and I'm good to go." This technology also saved the church money by avoiding the cost of hiring electricians to run circuits for dimmer racks.

The entire building's data is run off a Path Port Network system. DMX accessibility allows for a dedicated lighting network that can be accessed from jacks throughout the building. "If needed, I could control lights from the main auditorium or my office," says Thiesen. To preserve the ceiling's height a decision was made to forgo catwalks. Instead, the lighting grid

is entirely on motors enabling crew to easily bring in and change out fixtures.

For Seth Thiesen, the highlight of the automated system is the Robe ColorSport 1200E AT and ColorWash 1200E AT. "We currently own 16 of the spots and six of the washes, with an additional 14 High End Systems Studio Color 575s. The Robes are great lights—bright, quick, good color selection, and very affordable," says Thiesen, adding, "In addition to those, we have 20 City Theatrical Auto Yokes with ETC Source Four 19-degree ellipsoidal fixtures with iris modules. The auto yokes make life very nice. Fourteen ETC Source Four PARs and two ETC Source Four ellipsoidals serve as side light and back light for fixed locations on the stage. Overall, having everything automated is amazing. I can [easily] make changes, practically at the last minute."

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