

Auditorium Seating For Your Church

**An Effective
Solution to
Achieve Your
Ministry
Objectives**

Most churches probably wouldn't think of auditorium seating as their choice for worship area seating. Traditional pews and chairs are certainly the more familiar option. For many church situations, pews or chairs remain the best alternative. Nevertheless, many churches have found that auditorium seating can be an effective solution to the challenges of growth, budget, comfort, layout, stewardship and ministry objectives. Here are some of the reasons why.

Longer Rows, Fewer Aisles

A primary motivation behind many churches' move toward auditorium seating is the potential for greater seating capacity. How can you get more seats in the same amount of space? If you packed people in as tightly as they sit on a low-budget airline, chances are you'd be in violation of more than one code. But local fire and building codes vary on restrictions for different types of seating. For safe exit procedures, local codes set limits on several physical characteristics, including:

- ▶ Spacing between rows
- ▶ Greatest distance from any seat to the closest aisle
- ▶ Width of aisles

When conventional pews are placed in rows of 36 inches back-to-back spacing, most seating codes do not allow rows to be more than 24 feet long. Auditorium seating, with seats in the up position, creates up to 50 percent more room for people to enter and exit rows.



The First AOG Church in Tallahassee, Fla. shows that auditorium seating works in various shapes and sizes.

by Michael Warren

According to most local codes, this additional passage between rows extends the legal limits of seats per row to almost double that of pews. With the codes allowing a greater distance from any theater seat to the closest aisle, rows can be made longer. In many cases, this factor can increase the amount of floor space available for seating by 10 percent to 15 percent.

In churches where a narrow building means no extra aisles to lose, auditorium seating can be placed in tighter rows, perhaps 34 inches apart. Though the rows can't be lengthened in such cases, an extra row or two might be added to the seating configuration. *Caution: Codes will not permit closer and longer rows at this time.*

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Personal Space

Another factor that affects seating capacity is the tendency for people to distance themselves, creating a “comfort zone” between themselves and other worshippers. Auditorium seating counteracts this inclination and prompts people to sit shoulder-to-shoulder, comfortably, without losing the space between occupants.

Studies have shown that people sitting in continuous, bench-style seats, usually take up 26 or more inches per person. Congregants tend to spread out when the seat spaces are undefined, leaving five to six inches between occupants. With auditorium seats people are given 20 to 23 inches each. This reflects a 20 percent seating loss in an auditorium that appears to be full. Auditorium seating, by creating individually defined seating spaces, can conserve this 20 percent loss which provides higher seating capacity potential.

The Cost of Space

Although auditorium seating may cost a bit more initially, in the long run they will save the facility money and headaches.

The cost per seat, however, is only one way to figure your seating value. In order to establish the real



More standing room means greater comfort as illustrated by Hillcrest Church in Dallas.



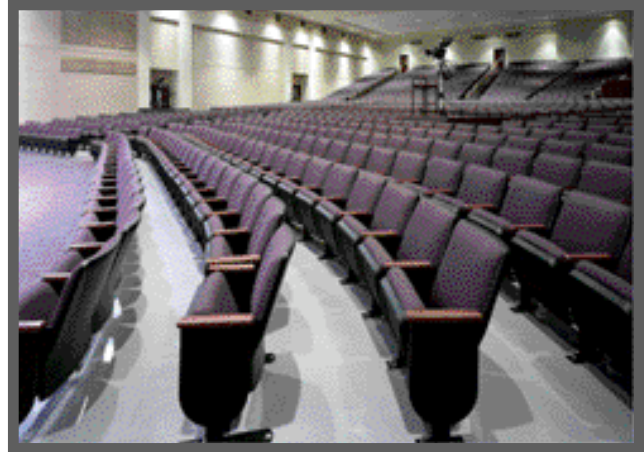
In the sanctuary of Kings Park International Church in Durham N.C., the design connects all vantage points with the platform.



An example of auditorium seating with traditional end caps at the Stone Temple MBC in Chicago.



Longer rows mean fewer aisles in Abundant Life Church in St. Louis.



The raised section in Antiock Fellowship in Dallas provides for good sight lines.

cost of seating you must factor in the cost of your building against the number of people it will seat. For example, if you build a \$1 million dollar sanctuary that can accommodate a thousand seats, wouldn't you want to get your money's worth? Since auditorium seating can typically add about 15 percent to your seating capacity you now have the ability to plan for your future growth. Alternatively, you can design a smaller building, using auditorium seating to house the same number of people as you currently have. Either way you're saving money in the long run.

Comfort

Comfort is more an issue of practicality than luxury. The goal of seating design is to eliminate the discomfort that distracts from the focus of worship. Many seats, auditorium as well as pews, are built with contoured foundations to provide needed back and leg support while relieving pressure. These designs fit the human anatomy in a way that encourages attentive posture. The occupant benefits most from these designs when sitting in an alert position.

Comfort is equally important when standing. Over 90 percent of worship installations using pews or auditorium seats are spaced 36 inches, back-to-back. Pews offer 12 inches of standing space between the pew in front of you and the one you sit in. The flip up auditorium seats allow up to 50 percent more standing room between rows. Since much of the worship time is spent standing, the worshippers' mobility becomes a practical issue.

More standing room means greater comfort. Also, more room between rows increases the ease of traffic flow before, during and after the service.

Layout Configuration

Architects and engineers are reaching new levels of achievement with some of the facilities being designed and built these days. The traditional look is slowly disappearing giving way to designs incorporating varying shapes, sizes and new worship requirements in mind. Many pastors and congregants are looking for additional ways their facility can be utilized. Auditorium seating can be installed in many different fashions: radius shape, offset, longer rows, fewer aisles, riser mounted and better front to back spacing. This provides for better sight lines, improved capacity and more useable space and connects all vantage points with the platform subject.

Ministry Objectives

What are the ministerial objectives of the facility? Do you want to focus on one particular type of person or do you want to make yourself available to everyone? Many feel that auditorium style seating adapts to this variety much better. With more and more facilities looking at multi-functional environments, individual auditorium seating allows for ticketing for a wide variety of special events. These events can serve a greater ministerial purpose and provide additional revenue for the church. ❖

Church Interiors Inc., established in 1981 is a turnkey renovation company offering a host of services ranging from church construction to pew upholstery. They are an Irwin Seating dealer for the worship marketplace. For further information please call 800.289.7397 or visit www.churchinteriors.com.