

Renkus-Heinz Equips Music-Focused Lutheran Church with Sound Solutions to ‘Make a Joyful Noise’

Foothill Ranch, California, MONTH XX, 2022 — Christ the King Lutheran Church, known as The Music Church by locals, has been a small but mighty presence within southwest Houston, Texas, since 1944. With a deep appreciation for history, tradition, and classical, faithful music, the congregation was faced with a dilemma. Church leadership knew that an audio solution upgrade was necessary to improve the quality of spoken-word audio for services, but the congregation was very concerned about the visual aesthetics of any loudspeakers that may be used. Determined to preserve and share the historical High Mass style liturgy and its sacred music with the community as traditionally and accurately as possible, Christ the King Lutheran Church found the sound solution in Renkus-Heinz steerable loudspeakers.

“I have worked with many churches of all denomination and design,” said Michael Austin, President of Native Media Sales, a Manufacturer’s Representative firm based in San Antonio, Texas. “But this church, acoustically speaking for musical applications, is stunningly gorgeous to the ear. I’ve never heard any nave or sanctuary that sounded better for music, but when it came to the spoken word, there were big acoustic challenges — people couldn’t understand what was being said just eight feet in front of them.”

The modest nave of the church with room for about 300 features high, sharply-angled hardwood ceilings, stone floors, a complement of stained-glass windows, and a large pipe organ within the rear wall. The worship space isn’t a typical design; it’s an in-the-round layout, with the alter and services taking place in the center of the sanctuary.

Built for Bach

Over the years, the church has invested significantly in their music. The nave features a stunning pipe organ designed in the spirit of instruments cherished by Johann Sebastian Bach. The church also has a Bach-favorite, 1719-style harpsichord, and two top-quality grand pianos, a Blüthner in the nave, and a Bösendorfer in the Parish Hall. With such a musical foundation, the Bach Society at Christ the King Lutheran Church was founded in 1982 as an interest group within the congregation.

“The liturgy we provide is called a High Mass. It’s a traditional Lutheran service where we do incense, all the vestments, the full choir and accompanying live music. Our church is one of only two Lutheran churches in the Houston area that do the High Mass style liturgy,” said Rachel McWhirter, Director of Digital Ministry, Christ the King Lutheran Church, and Media Producer for the Bach Society. “Our congregation has been preserving the history and integrity of the liturgy and the worship space, and people were nervous about adding a sound system. The congregation was asking, ‘Are we going to change our tradition for the sake of technological advancement?’”

Tech vs. Tradition

Faced with the need to improve the audio quality and intelligibility of the spoken word within the nave, the church began a sound system upgrade project with strict guidelines: a discreet system that provided high intelligibility without compromising live music. The new audio upgraded needed to be as hidden as possible to preserve the architecture and history of the space yet provided enough audio control to accommodate the in-the-round configuration and deliver high-quality, spoken-word and live music audio for the pews.

“So, when the church contacted us to help design and install their new system, we immediately thought of

Renkus-Heinz, so I reached out to Michael at Native Media, our regional Renkus-Heinz rep, for his advice. This was a unique project and we had to make sure we had the best sound solution possible," said Danny Elizondo, Project Manager, Conference Technologies Inc., (CTI).

After evaluating the nave, the CTI team worked with Austin to set up a temporary Iconyx Compact loudspeaker system from Renkus-Heinz to demonstrate the system's beam steering capabilities. Using digital beam steering technology allowed the church to focus the spoken word audio on the audience and congregation where it needed to be. Vertically, sound beams are narrow — almost laser-like — and when directed appropriately, the sound avoids unwanted reflections from walls, ceilings, floors or other architectural features like balconies or large glass windows.

This level of sound beam control drastically reduces the long reverberation times and echoes that overwhelm spaces and make the spoken word difficult to understand.

"We set up the demo system, dialed in the beam steering to fire over the in-the-round altar space to cross over and cover the pews on the opposite sides," explained Austin. "We usually don't want to do this because the pastors are walking around with wireless microphones, so it's an invitation for feedback. But with the beam steering from Renkus-Heinz, we were able to position the acoustic center over the presenter area to avoid any trouble and perfectly cover the congregation with intelligible audio. We left the temporary system in place for a few months, and everyone was elated and ready to move forward for the permanent install."

Ultimately, the team installed a set of four Renkus-Heinz [ICLive X](#) modules in stacked ICLXL / ICLLX pairs mounted on vertical wooden beams that rise in the center and sides of the nave. The placement allows the sound to be directed over the worship space in the center of the room to cover the pews on each side of the nave. Further back in the space toward the Bach organ, two Renkus-Heinz [DC12/2](#) columns are wall mounted to deliver the spoken word front to back within the room. Each speaker is factory color-matched to virtually disappear. Together, by significantly reducing the spoken word reflections and by keeping the audio focused on the pews and the congregation, the narrow and discreet systems deliver the voice clarity and intelligibility that the church needs.

A Joyful Noise

"Now, for the first time, our entire congregation can easily understand our ministers, and we didn't have to sacrifice our aesthetic or traditions. Our presiding Bishop visited us in December 2021, and she was very impressed with the sound quality. This fantastic audio technology has sparked a considerable interest within the congregation for upgrading and expanding systems in other parts of our church," added McWhirter. "It's interesting to note that the pedal tower of our Bach organ has a Latin inscription that perfectly captures our church's spirit; it translates as 'Make a joyful noise to the Lord'... and Renkus-Heinz is allowing us to do exactly that!"

About Renkus-Heinz

Headquartered in Foothill Ranch, California, Renkus-Heinz, Inc. has become a respected member of the professional audio community and is the worldwide leader in the design and manufacture of digitally steerable arrays, powered & non-powered loudspeakers, system specific electronics & fully integrated Reference Point Array systems www.renkus-heinz.com

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