

REVIEW

BY BRANDON STEENBOCK



FULCRUM ACOUSTIC

Bringing Clarity to St. Paul Lutheran

St. Paul's Lutheran of New Ulm, MN is a 151-year-old congregation rich in history and tradition, with a sanctuary that reflects it. Acoustically designed to maximize the sound of an organ or a choir, you'll find few worship spaces as vibrant. The walls are plaster and stained glass, the seats are uncushioned oakwood pews, and except for the carpeting on the chancel and aisle, the floors are cement tile. A space like this presents a challenge, though, when trying to introduce a praise band, or to deliver the preacher's voice with clarity to every congregant.

This was a challenge I faced when I inherited oversight of St. Paul's church technology. Twenty-five years earlier the leadership at the time tried to address an outdated speaker system that didn't deliver the pastor's voice intelligibly. Their solution was to install three sound orbs that drove a floodlight pattern of sound down onto the pews. Some seats had excellent clarity, other were dead zones, and still others were a jumble of echoes.

Our first step was to define what we were looking for. We wanted to make it easier to understand the pastor – that was priority one. But priority two was to help our praise band sound as good as our organ. Priority three was that it could be integrated into our current building without being unsightly, and without breaking the bank. We consulted with several companies to find a design that would accomplish all of these things.

In the end we relied on the folks at Intermedia Systems Group from Burnsville, MN, who recommended that our best bet for the main speakers would be the Fulcrum Acoustic DX1295, with US212 subwoofer to fill in the lower

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH'S NEW FULCRUM ACOUSTIC DX1295 SPEAKERS, A US212 SUBWOOFER FOR THE LOWER REGISTERS AND RX699S TO FILL THE TRANSEPT BRING AUDIO CLARITY AND DEFINITION TO THE MAIN SANCTUARY. Photos Courtesy of Fulcrum Acoustic and Intermedia Systems Group



registers. Since our sanctuary is a Latin cross design, they also recommended a couple of Fulcrum RX699s to fill in the transept seating areas, and some Tannoy Di5W speakers for fill under our balcony.

We brought in our whole leadership team for the demo of the Fulcrum speakers, but because our sanctuary has a 45' peaked ceiling, a full demonstration of what it would sound like when it place wasn't possible. Nevertheless, comparing the Fulcrum speakers side by side with the sound orbs, the difference was incredible. We knew we'd found a winner. While they were not the cheapest option we had looked at, they certainly seemed to be worth the extra we would pay for them.

Integrating the system into our well-aged building was another matter. They are neither light nor small. However, the folks at Intermedia came through and successfully floated two of the DX1295s and the US212 subwoofer without obstructing the view of any of the ceiling artwork. Fulcrum provided the speakers with a matching paint color

to blend in with our ceiling, which went a long way to keeping them unobtrusive.

One speaker was hung above the chancel area and another about halfway toward the back of the seating area, with a time delay to sync with the other speaker. The sound is shaped to provide coverage for the entire seating area, with volume variance of less than two decibels across all seats. The angle of projection greatly decreases reverberant sound, so all in all our number one goal of increasing the clarity of the preacher was accomplished.

This wasn't the case on the first weekend after they were installed, though. Two of our three pastors were out of town when the system was installed, so we were not able to tune the system to their voices and find the right volume balance until after the first weekend. Once tuned, however, our people couldn't say enough about how pleased they were. Many people who had been previously using assisted listening devices found that they no longer needed them.

The Fulcrum speakers did their job with the praise band, as well. Since the DX1295s are 3-way, there is a richness to the sound from high to low, and the subwoofer extends that even further, so that people can hear the kick drum as well as the flute, and everything in between. This isn't necessarily an automatic process; I spent a significant amount of time learning the new mixer board and how to shape the sound just right. But now when our band includes brass, the other instruments aren't lost.

Overall, we've been very pleased with the purchase of these speakers. We owe a lot to Intermedia Systems Group for the work they put in to installing and tuning the system, and to Fulcrum for providing a great product. We hope not to have to purchase new speakers for many years, but when we do, we'll definitely put Fulcrum on the list of options.

Brandon Steenbock serves as Minister of Family and Youth at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New Ulm, MN. He also handles church side technology and brews excellent coffee. He blogs regularly at familyministerbrandon.wordpress.com. St. Paul's Church can be found online at splnewulm.org.

BRANDON'S REPORT

EASE OF USE	★★★★★
FLEXABILITY	★★★★★
STABILITY	★★★★★
PRICE	★★★★★
OVERALL VALUE	★★★★★