

The Reasons for the optimal placement of the organ
by Jim Collins, Director of Music
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Of primary importance: The organist must hear the organ in real time – meaning every sound must be heard clearly and exactly at the time it is played from the console. With the current console position under the balcony, that is impossible. Not only is there a delay between pressing a key or pedal and hearing the sound, but I'm roughly estimating (guessing) about how loud the sounds are in the church. From where I'm sitting, everything is muffled – compared to what is heard from the pews. Just so you know, the same thing would essentially be true if the console were placed in the balcony because the speakers (and future pipes) will be placed in different locations in the church.

The role of the choir and quartet is to lead the congregation in the singing of hymns and service music. In order to be truly effective, they also must hear the organ in real time. And if the new console is placed correctly, it will be possible to use the organ on some anthems with the choir. What a joy that would be for all of us!

The “center axis of reverberation” is considered by acoustical experts to be the best place for sound. That is where the greatest distance occurs between the floor and ceiling, hence the reason for churches with high ceilings and especially domes. In our case, that is the center aisle, which is why you are clearly audible when speaking from that point, whether or not you use your microphone. You should note that that is also where the speaker for our current sound system is located – way up on the ceiling.

Many years ago, I was the chairman of a Presbyterian Worship Task Force for the equivalent of our diocese. We were involved in 3 years of research which culminated in a presentation at a national conference on worship. In serving on that task force we learned that worship is a sacred play in which the presbyters (priests), readers, choir, and organist lead the congregation for the sole member of the audience: Almighty God. I have always loved that philosophy and try to achieve it as I play on Sunday mornings.

So we must do everything we can to make our worship presentation the best that it can be. The choir should be placed in the church where it can be clearly heard and where they are truly a part of the worship. The organ console should be located where the organist can hear it clearly, accurately, and immediately – and where the choir and organist can see each other. And the choir and organist should all be located in the “center axis of reverberation” so that all of the textures of the music can come together and produce a unified and magnificent sound.