

Sanctuary update gives McPherson Christian Church contemporary look, flexible worship options

A desire to replace blue-green carpet that was over 40 years old and some dated paneling led to a complete redecoration of the McPherson First Christian Church sanctuary and a reconfiguration of the stage.

“The church sanctuary was built in the mid-1960s and not a thing had been done to it since. Everything was original,” Emma Perera, sanctuary chairperson, said. “It was time.”

While there were discussions among church members about what colors should be used and what physical changes should be made to the sanctuary, one thing was not a point of discussion. Fuqua Construction Inc. of Inman was the builder of choice for the remodel work from the beginning, according to Perera.

“Fuqua Construction had installed our elevator in the 1980s and that was such a good experience that no other contractor was even considered. When (discussion of the project) first started, Max was it. We liked him and liked the work he had done on the elevator. No other alternatives were discussed,” Perera said.

It took about two years from the first conversations about what changes the congregation would like to completion of the project. Six to eight months were spent on conceptual planning, the funds were raised and then construction began. Actual work on the building started in late spring 2009. The dedication service was held on October 18, 2009.

Perera said the congregation’s primary goals when undertaking the project were to update the color palette and materials in the sanctuary and make the stage/platform area of the sanctuary more handicapped accessible. The original stage had several levels with fixed choir seating and podiums making it nearly impossible for wheelchair-bound individuals to easily maneuver in the space. The church members wanted a more flexible arrangement.

In addition to a complete redecoration of the sanctuary, the project also included updating of all the lighting, heating and cooling systems; reconfiguration of the former multi-level stage to a one-level platform design; some work in the narthex and



PROJECT PROFILE

McPherson First Christian Church

Location: McPherson, Kansas
Design Build Team Fuqua Construction, Inc
Project Scope: Remodel of existing sanctuary.

hallways connecting to adjoining spaces and – an unexpected upgrade – bringing the fire alarm and emergency lighting systems up to code. The fire monitoring system work had to be completed before a building permit for the project could be issued.

The completed project uses a color palette of warm neutrals and maroon accented with stone to create a clean-lined, restful, contemporary effect that welcomes worshippers.

“Everything went very smoothly,” Max Fuqua said. “The planning committee and congregation were tremendous to work with. They got answers back to us quickly when there were decisions to be made.

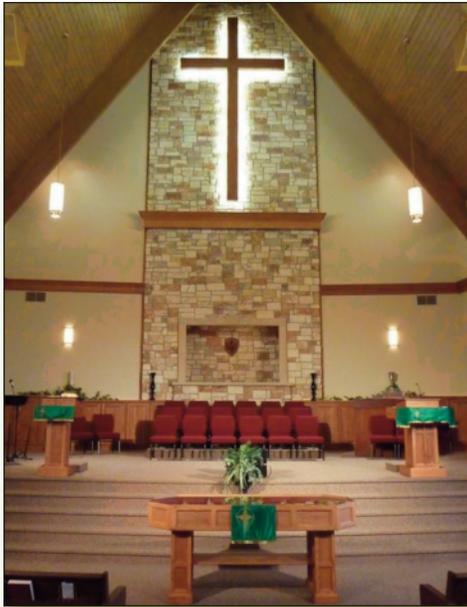


Worshippers at the McPherson First Christian Church are enjoying the transformation of the sanctuary from a dated, 1960’s look to one that is contemporary and flexible to meet their needs.

Positive, productive communication between all the parties on a project is one of the benefits of the design-build model used by Fuqua Construction as it encourages ongoing conversation between the parties involved and provides a more fluid process if circumstances require changes. A typical design-build project

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brings together owners, architect and contractor in the early stages of the planning process in a team approach that continues until completion. The project is bid as whole, rather than bidding out each phase and element of construction separately, allowing greater flexibility in locking in costs for the owner and smoother scheduling of subcontractors – both of which help minimize price overruns and construction delays. Since this project required no structural changes, no architect was needed. Max Fuqua, drawing on his experience with past church projects, provided consulting on the redecoration and new configuration of the sanctuary. Conceptual drawings were provided by Larry Voth of Fuqua Construction in consultation with Fuqua.



Stone accents replace outdated paneling at the front of the sanctuary. All fixtures on the platform are moveable, providing flexibility in worship.

Perera described the planning and construction process as a give-and-take between the church committee and the Fuqua team throughout the project.

“They would listen to what we wanted to accomplish, give some suggestions and then come back with several options for us to consider,” Perera said. “When we learned we would have to update the fire alarm and electrical system before we could get our building permit, Max helped us work through the process.”

Perera said that even with the unexpected expense to bring the space up to code, the project came in very close to the planned budget. She credited that to Fuqua Construction’s expertise and knowledge of options.

“There were things that we had budgeted for, but Max suggested changes that cost less and actually looked better than what we had planned. That allowed us to do other things we didn’t think we could fit into the budget,” Perera said.

One of those suggestions involved the handicapped accessibility of the stage. The sanctuary floor is sloped theater-style from back to front with five steps from the floor to the first level of the stage. Additional levels held the choir loft, organ and podiums. The building committee’s original idea was to raise the level of the floor to the stage level eliminating some or all of

the floor-level steps – an expensive option. However, the Fuqua team noted that the back of the stage was at the same level as a hallway which ran next to the sanctuary and provided access to the back stage area. They suggested removing the multiple levels on the stage and providing handicapped access from the back – a much simpler solution to the problem.

The change to the platform design provides the added benefit of complete flexibility in the platform’s arrangement. Everything now used on the platform --from choir chairs, to podiums to musical instruments -- are moveable.

“The project gave the sanctuary a contemporary style that is now adaptable to contemporary worship styles. (The old configuration) made it difficult for anything but a liturgical style. There was no open space,” Fuqua said.

As the project moved from design to construction phase, the sense of partnership grew stronger, Perera said. Max, project manager Bob Griffin and site manager Steve Basinger, were easy to work with and available whenever needed. Construction workers were very sensitive that the building was still being used every day and every effort was made to contain dust and reduce obstacles to the church staff.

The congregation continued to worship in the adjoining educational building throughout construction and the sanctuary would often be opened on Sunday so parishioners could see how the work was progressing. Perera said there would be some dust, but it was actually less than expected, and the building was always left in good shape for Sunday services.

It was a very smooth process, which Perera attributed to the professionalism and consideration of the Fuqua crew.

“So often when there is a building project in a church, there’s this small mushroom cloud of problems hanging over it. We didn’t have that. Usually, you can’t wait for the project to be finished and the workers to be gone. When it was all over, the staff said they missed the workers. They had become family. It was tough letting them go,” Perera said.

The church has now had several months to use their updated facility and they are very pleased, Perera said. The open format of the stage platform has been appreciated as the congregation celebrated the Christmas and Easter seasons and it has easily accommodated concerts and special programs. In fact, the only thing Perera might have done differently might have been to be a little bolder with the color, she said, adding that was a small matter of personal taste that didn’t affect the functionality or aesthetics of the space.

“We are enjoying it. It is fantastic. Throughout the process I kept thinking that God is having his hand in this and that we got the right contractor,” Perera said.

The congregation’s next project will likely be updating and remodeling of the connected education building, which was built in the 1950s, and the soaring sanctuary ceiling, Perera said. There are challenges associated with those projects, but her experience with the sanctuary update and Fuqua Construction has left Perera optimistic.

“I’m looking forward to the next phase of construction,” she said.