

Automated Lighting For The Church

By Donnie Brawner

"Movers", "Smart Lights", "Wiggle Lights", or just plain "Rock and Roll Lights". Whatever descriptive name you choose, one thing is certain; the automated lighting fixture has made itself a standard in almost all live event situations. But what about churches? Should something that is considered so flashy, so high tech, so "special effect" by nature, have a place in Houses of Worship? In this article I discuss the contributions an automated light can make to any service.

CONTEMPORARY USAGE:

Today many churches are incorporating a "contemporary" style of worship for at least one of their services. This style targets a generation that was born into a kind of technology that their forefathers only envisioned as futuristic. This group is accustomed to being barraged with the kind of high-tech activity that clamors for their attention and tries all their senses from every direction. They move and think as fast as the world around them and, in turn, use the same technology to keep up with it. It only makes sense to use a style of worship to minister and reach this group in a medium to which they readily relate.

In the lighting world the moving light is a "perfect fit" of technology within the contemporary service. Color changes, iris chases and panning light beams with gobo patterns in them are just some of the special effects backgrounds incorporated for presentations and pageants. And we can't stress enough how much more impact high energy praise music has when it is enhanced visually with color and light movement.

TRADITIONAL USAGE:

While the automated light fits easily into the contemporary style of worship, what about the tried and true "traditional" worship style? In a world of constant chaos and change many still prefer to find spiritual connection through reverence and tradition without the distraction of flashing colors or sweeping beams. For this group the dichotomy of "Religion" and "Rock & Roll" can be adamantly strong so it comes as no surprise to find some churches refusing (or at least balking at) the use of automated lighting when updating their lighting systems. True, at first glance, it seems this fixture would have little use in this style of worship. However, closer examination may open doors of practicality and creativity hidden in the "Flash and Trash" toy image of the so-called "Rock & Roll" light.

When we understand that the automated lighting fixture was created as an answer to limitations surrounding "conventional" lighting fixtures we see the following benefits.

First and foremost is the issue of focusing: Not only can a light be moved from one area to another by the push of a button, but many fixtures allow you to determine the size of the beam angle, as well as whether you want a soft or hard edge on your focus. All without the use of ladders, lifts or singed fingertips. This is very helpful when trying to get light into a hard-to-light area.



Next is the duplicity capability: One moving light is capable of doing the work of multiple conventional fixtures. For example, the same automated light used to highlight a soloist in the choir can also light a pastor down front and then highlight the baptistery above the choir.

Finally, but not all-inclusively - Expanded creativity: It is no secret; studies have shown that use of light and color creates a marked impact on the viewer. Studies have also shown people are more likely to recall what they hear when it is paired with a visual (as opposed to hearing only). Automated lights can be used to design such visuals, thereby creating an impactful message. Color mixing can be used to consistently create, recreate and change any color in the spectrum. Gobo patterns are helpful for soft video backgrounds or isolating a focus area. And the new automated LED fixtures offer efficient lighting, low heat generation, lower maintenance costs and lower installation costs; but that's a whole separate article in itself.

JUST USAGE:

The most important point of any worship service is the message. How the message is presented depends on the preferences of the church. While contemporary messages allow for greater uses of the moving light's visual capabilities, the key to lighting a traditional service is "respect". Choose your looks wisely based on the message. Use fewer looks throughout the service. Lengthen fade times between transitions. Use the theory, less is more. And then add a heaping dose of subtly.

So call it what you want; "Wiggle lights", "Smart lights" or "Rock & Roll lighting". Both styles of worship can take advantage of automated lighting for its remote focusing options, its ability to do the work of multiple stationary fixtures, and its finger tip lighting creativity to help deliver high-impact messages. After all, a name is just that... a name.

"Who in the world came up with the name 'Wiggle Lights' anyway?"

Donnie Brawner is the president of Brawner & Associates, LLC, a live event production and auditorium design firm. Nationwide clients include churches, academic spaces, Fortune 500 companies, and amusement parks. Visit www.Brawnerassociates.com or email at dbrawner@brawnerassociates.com for more information.

