

CONGREGATIONAL VOTE ON SEATING

White Paper

At the Annual Meeting in May, the Congregation approved the Capital Improvement Plan with the proviso that votes be held on whether or not to replace the Parks front doors and whether or not to refurbish the existing pews or replace them with flexible seating. Two subcommittees were formed to examine options and this is the report of the Flexibility Team charged with evaluating seating.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the Team's review and assessment of both options, we arrived at a preference for flexible seating over refurbishing existing pews. The main reasons for our choice are outlined below:

- Flexible seating meets the primary goal of the World Café/Capital Improvement Plan process to achieve a "more affordable, accessible, flexible and attractive facility," and stationary seating does not.
- Flexible seating allows more variation in Sanctuary and facility use, especially different forms of worship and all-church events.
- Flexible seating presents a newer, more modern look than pews, and would be more appealing to younger people and families whom we hope to both keep and attract.
- We can have chairs built to our specifications that are compatible with and complement the design features of the Sanctuary.
- Modern church seating design not only allows for flexibility, but also unified design, improved comfort and a variety of compatible seat lengths (single, double and triple seats) offering more choice.
- Flexible seating allows wheelchair users to be integrated into the core of congregation seating, if so desired.
- These chairs are specifically designed to be placed in areas of worship fulfilling the purpose of seating elements afforded by traditional pews that support the strength of church community.
- The overall look of the new seating for most Sunday services will be similar to what we have now and bears no resemblance to conference hall seating.
- The cost difference between flexible seating and refurbishing pews was only about 39% per row of equivalent seating - \$1815 for chairs vs \$1130 for pews - for a total of roughly \$15,000.

BACKGROUND AND EVALUATION PROCESS

The nine-member Flexibility Team, both individually and together, evaluated the pros and cons of pews and flexible seating by discussing our needs with suppliers and talking to and visiting other congregations that use flexible seating. This included a team visit to nearby Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, which recently replaced its decades-old chairs with seats

manufactured by one of the suppliers we met with. Churches with chairs uniformly supported the benefits that come with flexible seating.

In our evaluation, we solicited and reviewed products and proposals from two major church seating suppliers and manufacturers. They were chosen because each could provide a variety of seating options, but most important, both have expertise in pews, as well as flexible seating. In addition, both firms are conveniently located in Lancaster County and were able to visit the Sanctuary to determine our needs.

The Team approached each vendor with the understanding that if the Congregation voted to keep the existing pews, they would be refurbished, refinished and seat and back cushions would be replaced. Keeping the existing pews in their current condition and in need of repair, wasn't regarded as a viable option.

If flexible seating is chosen, chairs specifically designed for worship would be made to the Team's selected preferences. Seat cushions for either choice would be made from the same material and fabric and have similar performance characteristics. However, because of the pews' lower seatback height, unlike the chair design, no accommodation was available for the lumbar area.

After reviewing products and proposals from both suppliers, we selected Bahret Church Interiors for reasons relating to better chair design, lower estimated costs and shorter refurbishing and production timeframes. In addition, unlike other options, Bahret's pew refurbishing process could be done in the Church and did not require the removal of pews for a long period of time. The in-house process involves removing seat cushions and stripping the existing wood finish using a steel wool -like sanding technique without harmful chemicals. Applying new finish, affixing new cushions and allowing time for curing is approximately two weeks for five or six rows. During that time, pews could not be used. Total time to refurbish all pews, without major disruption, is approximately two months.

Working with Bahret, the Team selected matching preferences for upholstery fabric and wood stain for both pews and chairs, updating the overall look, but remaining compatible with Sanctuary design features. In selecting preferences for chairs, we chose wooden legs, backs, cap rail, hymnal racks and, where needed, wooden armrests. In addition, we selected a chair design that allows the seats to be stacked, as well as locked and unlocked together for both stability and flexibility.

Having made these selections for flexible seating, we ordered six sample chairs for the congregation to test out. Unfortunately, the sample chairs that were due to arrive in the week before the vote have been delayed and will not arrive until week of the 21st. The sample chairs provide the dual benefits of showing what flexible seating looks like and how it could work, but also, because they will have the same cushion construction and fabric as the refurbished pews, people can get a feel for comfort. And, since the chairs are movable and stackable, we ordered a sample dolly to assess.

Note: In the course of our evaluation of seating needs for the whole Sanctuary, we determined that the upholstery for the chairs used by the choir should match the rest of the seating. As a result, and as part of our recommendation, the choir chairs would be upgraded. Because of the limited space on the risers, the replacement chairs need to be metal versions of the wood model that we selected. Our estimates of approximately \$2500 for 30 chairs show this would not incur significant additional cost.

Flexibility Team members:

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The attached chart provides a comparison of key features for both options.

Pews and Flexible Seating Comparison Chart

Assumes pews will be refinished with new cushions that will be the same thickness and fabric as the chairs.

Features	Pews	Chairs
Design	Mid-Century Modern	Modern
Movable	N	Y
Stackable	N	Y
Wood	Y	Y
Finish	Similar to organ	Similar to organ
Fabric	Poppy red/yellow highlight	Poppy red/yellow highlight
Seat Cushion	3"	3"
Seatback Cushion	1 1/4"	1 1/4"
Lumbar Cushion	N	1"
Seatback Height	30"	34"
Seat Depth	15"	17"
Height from Floor	15"± when seated	17"± when seated
Stability	Bolted to floor	Connecting locks
Book Racks	Facing seatback	Underneath
Cardholders	Facing seatback	Facing seatback
Made in USA	Y	Y
Cost per Row	\$1130 +/-	\$1815 +/-