

Sound Advice

Helpful Information from *Stewart Acoustical Consultants*

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FELLOWSHIP HALLS

by Noral D. Stewart

The church fellowship hall that is reverberant and noisy is the most common single problem we are asked to fix after it is built. These rooms are usually used for social or dining functions when many people are speaking at once. Other times they may be used for recreational activities by young people who are loud. Sometimes, they include gymnasium facilities. These rooms become loud when many people are talking. When few people are present, and sometimes even when the room is full, the reverberation can make it difficult to understand a speaker. Any such room built with a hard ceiling without advice from a qualified acoustician is almost certain to result in problems.

These rooms should be treated with a large amount of sound absorptive materials to control sound reflections and noise. Carpet on the floor can be part of the solution, but is rarely a complete solution or a necessary part of the solution. A suspended acoustical ceiling is often the most economical solution in new construction. If the ceiling is low, it should be highly absorptive. If it is high, it needs to be only moderately absorptive. However, wall treatment is usually needed in combination with high ceilings. Treating the ceiling is difficult in some existing rooms. Wall treatments alone can help, but will not usually produce an ideal result. Wall treatments and materials added to the ceiling after initial construction are usually more expensive than ceiling treatments installed in initial construction.

A variety of materials are available to treat existing rooms. They satisfy differing needs for durability, appearance, cost, and acoustics that result from different room uses, budgets, goals, and existing architecture. These include materials applied to or hung from the ceiling and materials added to walls. Other options are available for use in initial design that are not easily used later. We can even have a wood ceiling that is absorptive if that is desired.