



# tradition & technology

## *How the Two Go Hand-in-Hand at The*

**M**any pastors, worship leaders, lay leaders and members would like to see their churches relate in a way afraid this would mean sacrificing their traditional style. In many ways, it is easier for a new start-up for an existing church. Usually, the biggest obstacle for a new church is funding. The vast majority of exist in addition to financial challenges. These expectations can limit their freedom to enhance worship with multi-broadcasting and other forms of technology. It is tempting to be envious of new churches and to think of the as a challenge to overcome rather than a base to build upon. The Moody Church, however, has been blessed and history as an asset to be improved upon with new forms of communication.



**“Having a historic past  
is a benefit  
if it does not restrict a vision  
for the future.”**

Dr. Erwin Lutzer, Senior Pastor, The Moody Church

The Moody Church had been considering using multimedia in their worship services for ten years before it actually happened. Although they were prepared to make the investment in multimedia, the technology that would work in their sanctuary didn't exist until recently. At The Moody Church the standard is clear: “We have no desire to do anything that isn't impacting people's lives.” No matter what it is, if it doesn't meet that standard, they will pull the plug, says Michael Pitts (Director of Operations for The Moody Church).

## The Moody Church Quick-Facts

- started in 1864 as an outgrowth of Dwight L. Moody's Sunday School ministry
- Dwight Moody's first Sunday School met in a saloon in a part of Chicago known as “Little Hell”
- originally called The Illinois Street Independent Church, then The Chicago Avenue Church. “The Moody Church” was an informal nickname that came into use shortly after Moody's death in 1899
- current building was built in 1925
- location: Chicago, Illinois
- attendance: about 2,500 on Sunday Morning

# Moody Church

that is more familiar to our culture at large but are church to incorporate technology into worship than ing churches in America have built-in expectations media, i.e. image magnification (IMAG), internet expectations that come with tradition and history with leaders and members who see their traditions

The Moody Church began using projection equipment in their worship services in March 2003. While most churches start with projecting words to hymns, announcements, and sermon outlines, Moody's primary motivation was the implementation of IMAG (Image Magnification). They wanted the congregation to be able to see their Senior Pastor, Dr. Erwin Lutzer, during the

photo by Don Ontiveros



message regardless of where they were seated in the 4,000 seat auditorium.

### overcoming challenges

In order to implement IMAG, The Moody Church had to overcome two big challenges. First, they were especially concerned about preserving the historical architecture and aesthetics of the building. They all agreed that **“technology is to be experienced, not seen.”** Once installed, the new system would have to look as if it had been designed as part of the church in the first place. This project was a daunting task considering the auditorium was built in a day when “multimedia” would have meant radio and telegraph. In the early 1920s, the auditorium’s designers had paid careful attention to visual elements using the artistry and technology of the day. For example, the woodwork in the choir loft behind the platform included ornate carvings and structures that are still beautiful today. Although



retractable screens have been in existence for many years, anything big enough to be visible from the rear balcony would have blocked the view of the woodwork, making the system appear to be an afterthought.

The second challenge was finding equipment that would work in their facility. The Moody Church not only had to preserve the aesthetics of the auditorium, but they also had to use

projectors that were bright enough to work despite the ambient light created by their beautiful stained-glass windows.

To overcome these challenges, The Moody Church brought in the Fowler Design Group ([fowlerdesigngroup.com](http://fowlerdesigngroup.com)) early in the project. Custom screens with a 16:9 (widescreen) format were designed to ascend and retract as needed and were then discreetly installed behind the choir on both sides of the stage. This was not only appropriate for upcoming technology,



## “technology is to be experienced, not seen”

but it also allowed the screens to look like they were planned to fit. Considering the size of the screens and the size of the room, selecting projectors and lenses presented a challenge. To accommodate their architecture, a Panasonic projector and lens combination was installed that could be mounted one-third of the way back from the screens (this was the closest place to put the projectors where they could still be concealed.) Both 12,000 lumen projectors were draped with a curtain to hide them and alleviate excess noise. Holes were cut in the curtains to allow the projector’s beam to pass through. Special care was taken with cables and equipment, so that the end result blended into the woodwork... literally.

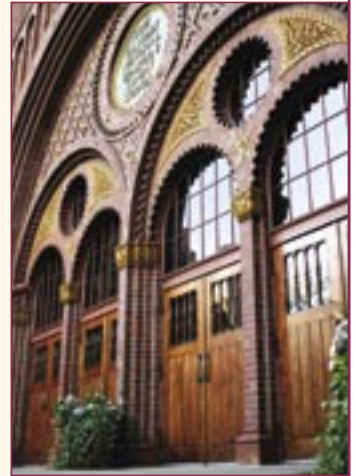
### up and running

Aesthetics are definitely important, Michael says, but the main key is to **use technology as an enhancement rather than an interruption.** When The Moody Church finally started using IMAG, they weren’t sure what the response would be; however, Michael says that they immediately started receiving positive feedback. For the first time ever, people can see Pastor Lutzer’s facial expressions from anywhere in the auditorium. Despite the expansive sanctuary, the screens actually pull you in to create an intimacy that was never felt before.

This same technology also gave The Moody Church the ability to record services for streaming video on the internet. The Moody Church has been able to reach people from over 50 different countries who log on to their website!

## The Moody Church History

The Moody Church, a ministry rich in evangelistic tradition and history, has been known to keep a finger on the pulse of new methods and technology. The very founding of the church in 1864 was a result of Dwight L. Moody’s decade of work to establish Sunday Schools among non-Christian children. In his day, D. L. Moody was considered radical and progressive. The children he recruited for Sunday School didn’t have a church because most churches didn’t really want them. They were “street urchins” from the slums with whom Mr. Moody met in an abandoned saloon.



From this early work to the present day, the hallmark of The Moody Church has been reaching people for Christ in a way that they can understand.

In 1926, Moody was one of the first churches to begin regular radio broadcasts, and television broadcasting started in 1959. In that same year, they overcame visitation challenges at newly-secure urban apartment buildings by using the telephone. Their telephone ministry took another leap forward in 1967, when The Moody Church began a dial-a-story message line featuring a popular local children’s TV program host. Then in 1983 – when very few people even knew what the word “multimedia” meant – The Moody Church produced a multimedia presentation to encourage the congregation in personal evangelism following a Ray Bakke seminar at the church.

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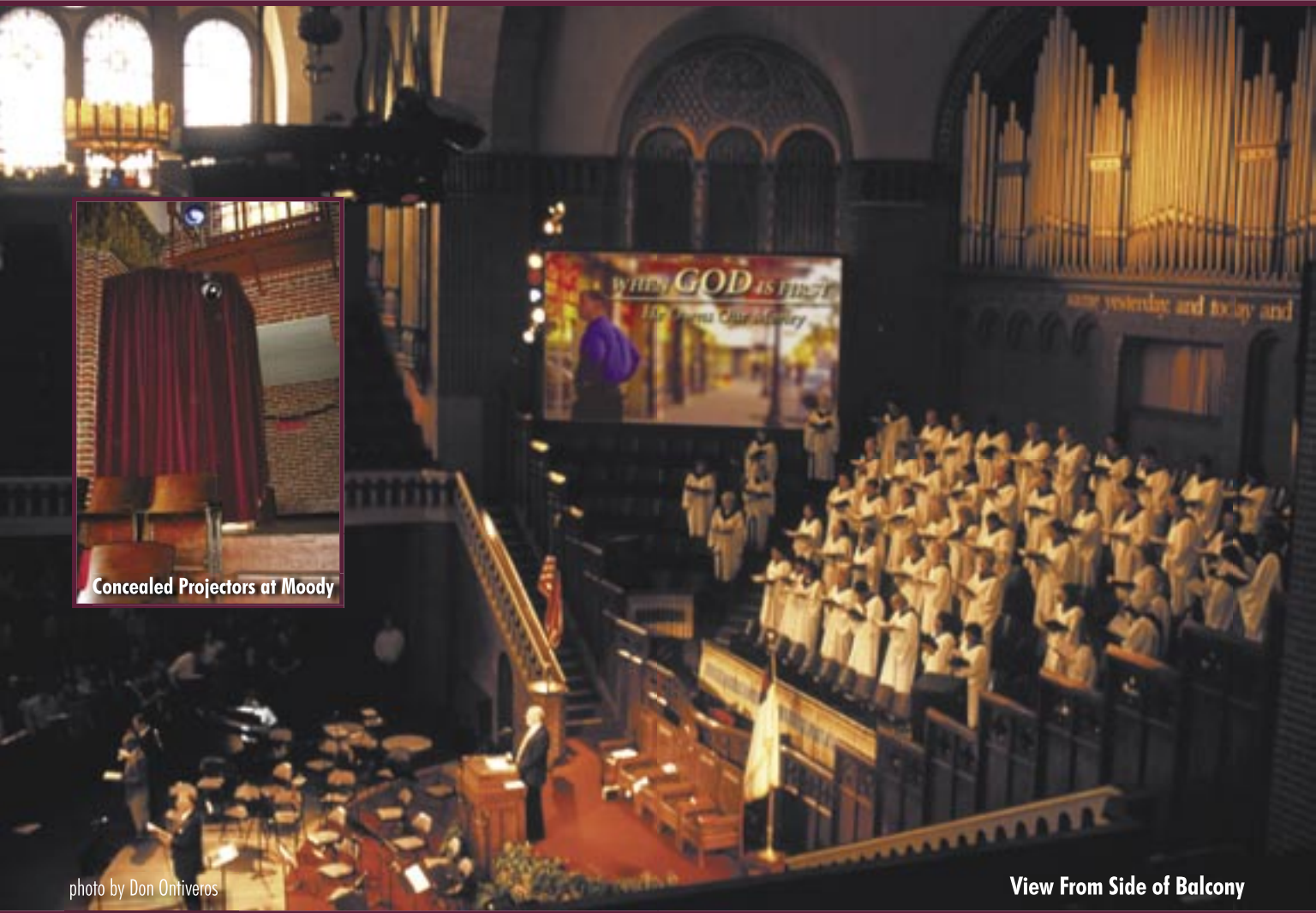


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Michael tells about receiving a letter from one young couple who had premature twins, requiring continual care for a year. Only one parent could attend services each week, but the other was still able to participate in worship through the internet. For that family, the new technology at Moody allowed both parents to stay connected during a very challenging time in their lives.

Multimedia at The Moody Church is still evolving. The congregation still enjoys singing from hymnals, so

**schedule your services**  
 Download this service planning spreadsheet at [vision-mag.com](http://vision-mag.com)  
 (spreadsheet template provided by The Moody Church)

Moody only displays words on the screen when singing a praise and worship chorus not found in the hymnal. As everyone has become more comfortable with the operation and use of the system, they have tried new things like projecting baptisms and baby dedications. What is cuter than a close-up of a baby?

We heard from almost every staff member that the most memorable, impactful moment since incorporating media at Moody was a video that was shown to raise awareness and funding for Kids' Club. Kids' Club is a non-profit organization, near and dear to Moody's heart, that reaches out to the inner city children of Chicago ([www.kidsclub.ws](http://www.kidsclub.ws)). Rather than doing a general overview, the video gave a glimpse inside the life of one teenage boy, the poverty he lived in, the challenges he faced, and the difference this ministry had made in his life. At the end of the video, the boy walked out on stage with Dr. Lutzer... there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

Wow! If a picture is worth a thousand words, how powerful is a video?

**what's next?**

According to Shelton Thompson (Technical Coordinator at The Moody Church), Moody's next step is a huge one considering both the investment in equipment and the volunteers needed. In this next phase, they will add two to three broadcast cameras giving them shots from multiple angles for IMAG and webcasting. To accomplish this, they will need to add more monitors and an actual production crew. "As God provides the resources, that's the direction we will move in," says Michael.

The Moody Church is passionate about missions, and is always looking for ways to connect the congregation with people in the mission field. Because of this passion, they plan on sending out short-term mission teams with gear enabling them to capture video of their experiences. They believe it will be a powerful tool to promote more involvement and support from the congregation by actually showing them the needs and work that is going

on.

**planning for change**

If you are part of a traditional church, integrating multimedia into your services is a big step and can be intimidating to some. We wanted to pass on several great suggestions Moody's staff shared on how to plan for such a change:

**1. visit other churches**

Michael says that they began by visiting other churches he considered to be similar in doctrine and worship style, and who were also using multimedia on a regular basis. He points out that visiting churches who are successfully doing what you're trying to do can help overcome the "fear factor," and give you valuable ideas. Considering the investment you are about to make, plane tickets are a nominal cost to help ensure the success of the project.

**2. decide on a plan**

It is critical to outline how you plan on using multimedia

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# Showing a Changed Life: Travis' Story

The Moody Church has always been heavily involved in ministry to their immediate community. One important ministry is Kids' Club, an after-school program in the heart of the Cabrini-Green housing project. Kids' Club is a place where at-risk kids can come for Bible study, tutoring, and electives such as sports and art.

When Moody wanted to share the successes and needs of Kids' Club with the congregation, they didn't want to just tell them a bunch of cold facts. Instead, they were able to invite the whole congregation, using their video projection system, into the life of one boy whose life was changed.

Travis is a 16-yr-old sophomore who is clearly passionate about Christ. Many young men in his neighborhood end up in gangs or in jail. Travis tells how Kids' Club helped him understand God for the first time. Instead of joining a gang, Travis is now reaching out to those same gangbangers. The video allowed every member to see the conviction and focus in Travis' face as he shared his testimony. The congregation was able to truly share in the victories they are helping to make happen through their support, one life at a time.



 **To Watch This Video,  
Visit [www.vision-mag.com](http://www.vision-mag.com)**

# interns the untapped resource

If you aren't having any luck recruiting volunteers, take note because The Moody Church is definitely on to something. Although you may not have Moody Bible Institute down the street, consider this: most universities, community colleges and even vo-techs have internship programs that you should know about. In fact, VISION Magazine often utilizes this valuable local resource. A quick look on the internet will often tell you who the department head is (for the department you need), along with their phone number and other contact information. This is a great place to get started. Professors and department heads are usually excited to find new internship opportunities for their students. Be prepared by listing not only the tasks you would like the intern to do, but also the skills you would like the intern to develop. Make sure to save this sheet so that you can add and subtract items as needed, giving you an updated list for the next time. Keep in mind that you will be asked to evaluate the student's performance and improvement so that they may receive a grade for the internship and get college credit. VISION Magazine also requires personal interviews before selecting the right candidate.



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in your ministry. What's important to the leadership? How should that look?

### 3. don't tell people what to expect, show them!

Michael found a very creative way to address the concerns about how this equipment would affect the aesthetics of the sanctuary. Many people have a difficult time envisioning something without actually seeing it. He helped them to see the end result by marking the specific places where the screens would be placed and by hanging up sheets to show the full effect. This visual allowed everyone the opportunity to examine sight-lines within the auditorium, and to address other concerns that came up.

### 4. plan for growth

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. When considering such a large investment of money, time and human resources, it is helpful and much less stressful to plan in stages. Perhaps you cannot afford all of the equipment that you want or need, or maybe you do not yet have the staff. If so, you're not alone! The important thing is to get started. But make sure that everything you **start** with can be **built** on down the road. You are laying the foundation. This is true with the equipment you purchase, the volunteers you train and the processes you put in place.

### 5. prepare for success

According to Nick Voss (Technical Director for The Moody Church), one mistake they made in the beginning was to underestimate the time and manpower needed for creating content, as well as running the equipment. Finding enough of these resources is an ongoing challenge to using multimedia in your worship. It is important to clearly communicate this and plan for it from the beginning. Know that your first year will be challenging. "Don't just give up... be creative!" encourages Nick. When Moody first installed their equipment they had no full time staff allocated for multimedia. In their case, Nick used the "shotgun approach," mapping out their needs to the whole congregation and offering training classes for volunteers. Most of the volunteers started out with no multimedia experience, but they have developed into "superstars" with some training.


Keep recruiting and training for your multimedia teams even



if you have all the people you envision needing. Nick insists it is wise to recruit three to four times as many volunteers as you think you'll need. By rotating responsibilities, you allow volunteers more opportunities to be "fed" spiritually, as well as protect them from burnout.

### 6. budget for growth

Michael Pitts strongly suggests budgeting for multimedia in your annual operating expenses, not just as a one-time capital cost. Operating expenses should take into consideration items such as replacement bulbs, creative content, keeping the equipment fine-tuned, and on-going training for volunteers and staff. It is also critical to budget for upgrading your equipment as new technology is developed.

While in Chicago, VISION Magazine had the pleasure of attending Sunday morning worship and seeing multimedia in action at this great historic church that we've all heard about since childhood. It is clear that The Moody Church has managed to successfully integrate the tools of today's culture while maintaining the traditional look and worship style that has been working for 140 years. 



To Watch Clips of Michael Pitts' Exclusive Interview About Tradition & Technology, visit [www.vision-mag.com](http://www.vision-mag.com)

## The Moody Church July 4th Presentation

One of the first major multimedia projects that The Moody Church undertook was for their 4<sup>th</sup> of July Service. Angie Longnecker, a volunteer who does graphic design for the church, said that their team wanted to incorporate a visual element to the songs. For example, with the song "The Star-Spangled Banner," rather than just finding a few generically patriotic slides to use as backgrounds to the words, they looked for pictures that matched the words of the song. For some verses of the song, they used single photos and for others they made collages of several photos. "I really enjoyed working on that," Angie said, "it was fun and it created a good emotion and mood to draw people in to think about the words more."



Angie Longnecker is an employee at Moody Bible Institute and a Volunteer for The Moody Church



To Watch Clips of Moody's July 4th Presentation, visit [www.vision-mag.com](http://www.vision-mag.com)

## tips to building strong volunteer teams

from Nick Voss, The Moody Church

- **Don't try to dictate everything, but rather, establish boundaries that volunteers can stay within.**
- **Give credit where credit is due! Remember, volunteers help in largely thankless jobs.**
- **Find out what motivates people and let them know they are needed.**
- **Identify who is committed so that you can focus on additional skills & training which may be useful in upcoming projects & opportunities.**
- **Set goals with time-frames... "By this time next year we will ..."**
- **Pray together.**
- **Make sure that everyone knows everyone else.**
- **Pair people up to work on projects together. This can not only make the project more fun, but it provides a built-in back-up for the project.**
- **Keep training... never stop! You should not only be training volunteers in higher skill levels, but keep recruiting and training new people, too!**
- **Make time for planning. The most effective leaders are proactive, not reactive.**
- **Always have a "PLAN B" to rely on when problems pop up (and they will!).**



Velma Ringo, Volunteer at The Moody Church