



Empower Church chose technology for a modern-day congregation

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While reaching out to thousands of people during the Covid-19 pandemic with food packages, school shoes, donations and planting churches, Empower Church's key mandate has been in the actual name of the church; to empower people to love the Lord, value family and be excellent in all they do. The Pretoria based church strives to be relevant to their modern congregation, and one of their main mission fields is their private school that offers affordable education to the less advantaged community, equipping 581 students with life skills to be the future business leaders, doctors, nurses, and lawyers.



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When it comes to Sunday Service technology keeps the message relevant, especially to the young audience that Pastor Gebhardt Berndt is zealous to serve. The church has steadily added equipment to their venue, the latest gear, supplied by DWR Distribution, comprising of a grandMA dot 2 XL-F, 2 Robin 300 LEDWash, 2 Robin LEDBeam 150s, a Louise II 63 distro and much to the worship team's delight, a Klang: Immersive Personal Monitoring system, Klang: Vokal and six Klang: Kontroller. The church has already started investing in an L-Acoustics system and own a DiGiCo SD12 and a Waves LV1 system.





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astor Gebhardt Berndt

It's been a hard-hitting year for Pastor Gebhardt, losing both his parents who were founding pastors in the church, a close friend who was also part of the ministry, and more recently, another family member. Despite the personal loss, he continues to testify of the goodness of the Lord. "I believe that God's purpose, which for me is to love people, is greater than I am. I'm passionate about people and I want to empower people and see them doing their best. I believe God made me strong to get through this and know that if I'm consistent and continue in love, He will be on my side."

Established in 1996, then known as Hatfield Christian Church North, the church was renamed Empower Church in 2018 with the inauguration of Pastors Gebhardt and Shannon Berndt. "We have seen growth as never before, not only on our home campus in Pretoria but new churches that have been launched in Durban, Cape Town, Secunda and Witbank. That's four churches planted in a time of famine. We've seen that God is a God who does the supernatural and who is faithful. Personal pain never defines eternal purpose."

Empower Church is all about engaging people, and in a world driven by technology, study algorithms and utilize all platforms like social media, online services, Youtube, TikTok and Instagram optimally, trying to reach as many people as possible. "It's important to understand that we live in 2021 and I can't have people come into the church and there's a plant and some people waving a flag. We create an experience, people step in and enjoy the vibe, the energy and the dances. I want people to say it's not just a church but a place where they belong. I'm using the cultural language of the day to unlock the hearts of the people for the gospel, and sound and lighting form part of the experience."

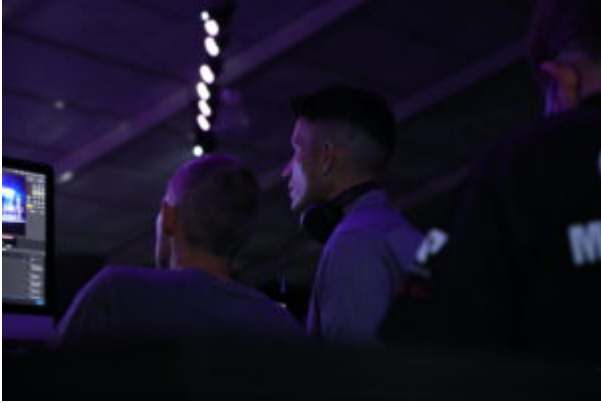


Pastor Gebhardt, during the pandemic, started with a large LED screen on stage, supplied by Theo Papenfus of Stage Effects, as a swift solution to help with the online service.

After each service, the church's dynamic technical team, including Derick Stokes who heads media and lighting, Moosa Moseneka, an expert in social media, and Marinus Visser, the newly appointed audio engineer, go through the recorded version of the Sunday service to see where improvements can be made. The process led Pastor Gebhardt and his team to investigate different elements to create successful live productions and shows. "I went to churches like CRC where I spoke to Pastor At Boshoff to see what he was doing at his church, I looked at Elevation Church and churches around the world to see how I could use cutting-edge technology and label it as Empower," he explains.



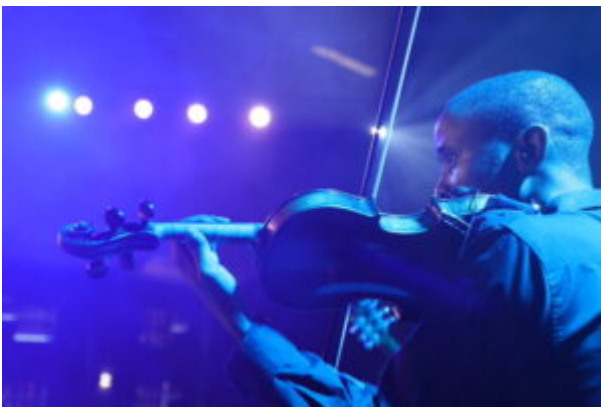
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Working alongside DWR's Jaco Beukes, Duncan Riley, Kevin Stannett and Jaques Pretorius, the church realized that a few new lighting fixtures and a new control board would visually make the world of difference. "Coming out of pandemic, the church worked hard to make their stage a beautiful set which is very appealing on camera," commented Duncan Riley of DWR. "Now the online experience is fantastic but it's also fantastic for the people watching in the audience. For DWR, the new gear purchased by the church has also helped us. It has put food on our tables and provided work in a very tough climate."



It initially took a bit of time for the volunteers to get their head around MA Lighting's dot2 XL-F, but soon striking looks were brought to the stage. The dot2 XL-F is a compact lighting console with up to 4,096 control channels. With a small footprint, it includes a full programming section, master playback section, 14 fader playbacks and 28 individual playback buttons. The built-in touch screens and support for one external touch screen ensure the do2 XL-F has the flexible hardware needed for almost any kind of show.



The Robin LEDWash 300 offers smooth colour mixing with an array of true colour and hues. The fixture is lightweight and compact for small to medium applications, particularly where space and accessibility is an issue. The LEDBeam 150 allows fast sweeping beams and a wide, far-reaching quality wash.



Jaco Beukes



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Jaco Beukes comments on the sound, “The church started discussing the possibility of Klang when the product was launched, but the time was never right to do a demo or get the system into the venue. When Marinus Visser stepped in as audio engineer, he said that it was very difficult for the sound guys to do monitors and front of house and started pushing the product. He felt that to help the entire technical team, we had to get the musicians in a position to control their own mixes. That was the main drive for Klang and I think the ability to create an individual environment for each muso just sealed the deal. When I was there for rehearsals, the musicians said it sounded so good and so real. I think when musicians are in a happy environment where they can hear and feel the music, they just perform so much better because they are not fighting the technical world, but just doing what they are supposed to do better.”



As a result of Covid-19, Pastor Gebhardt has changed the way he preaches. “I saw that people are visually stimulated and like to see something, rather than me just hammering down a message. My method of delivery has changed. I use props on stage and that is why we have a big stage. I have used items like a big raft to demonstrate that life is like a raft. If you don’t control the paddle, you will not go anywhere. Every week there is something else. My wife Shannon is a professionally trained dancer, and she listens to all the songs we plan for a Sunday, does the choreography, and teaches it to a core group of people. What this has done is put energy into the church. People go through tough things in the week, and when they come to church on a Sunday



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there needs to be passion, joy, and energy. I want to pick people up and send them back out into the world with new hope.”

