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Balcony Seating

When properly designed, balcony seating has some benefits worth considering. Balconies can solve the problem of future expansion as the congregation grows and can enable a church with limited land to expand "up" rather than "out". In fan-shaped sanctuaries a balcony can increase the seating by almost 50%. A future balcony should be master-planned from the start with the major structure completed during the sanctuary construction. A removable wall can temporarily hide this unfinished space.

Many people assume that a balcony is always an inexpensive and smart way to expand. However, the floor system, structural framing, riser framing, handrails and multiple stairways are an additional expense not incurred when seating on the main level. The primary problem with balcony seating, however, is often not related to construction costs. Many people complain of feeling like spectators when sitting in a balcony, and balconies often do not provide good visibility of, or easy access to, the altar area. Furthermore, it's simply difficult to see someone's face beyond about 65 feet. Since the sight-line is downward, balcony handrails and the person in the row ahead often block the view as well. Problems related to the seats under the balcony may include columns, low ceilings and poor sound or lighting.

Some elements of good design include stairs or stadium seating on the sides with easy access to the main floor, two steps per row for added visibility, high-back pews to alleviate the fear of falling forward, glass or narrow rails in the upper half of balcony walls, and large-screen video monitors or projection screens.

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