



PTZ Initiative Hits the Road

Church Production's PTZ Initiative is a three-part effort to, first, raise awareness of the production quality that newer PTZ cameras can deliver. Secondly, research and communicate best practices for using PTZ cameras in churches. And lastly, [create a dialog with church techs and creatives on the unique needs within the church market](#) with the goal of developing equipment that better supports a church's requirements and goals.



The first phase of the **project** involved a fact-finding mission, in partnership with JVC Professional Video, a Division of JVC Kenwood USA Corporation. Joe D'Amico, Vice President of JVC Professional Video, and Church Production Magazine Editor Brian Blackmore recently hit the road together to discover how church tech teams in central North Carolina are using PTZ cameras.

D'Amico and Blackmore visited three different-sized and style churches to speak with production managers and tech teams about PTZ camera use in their facilities. The houses of worship visited were small rural, medium, and larger size congregations. All three churches had experience using PTZ cameras in their production workflows.

PTZs: Vital to Small Churches

In the smallest church environment, PTZs were a vital component of their production capabilities, due to the way multiple cameras can be operated by a single volunteer. "It's a known fact that the smaller the church, the smaller the production team, and nothing beats PTZs when it comes to the efficiency of multiple cameras being controlled by a single operator," says Blackmore.



The smaller church had recently upgraded from using multiple cell phones to a five-camera, PTZ-based system that is used exclusively for their live stream. The church's volunteer tech director says the production quality of their live stream could not have been achieved within their current budget and staffing limitations without using PTZ cameras.

Modern PTZ cameras are not just easy to control—most offer features that ensure even the smallest, most rural churches have access to high-definition, broadcast-quality video production without the need for experienced broadcast production specialists on staff," adds D'Amico. "What's more, the price point helps these facilities stay within their tight budgets. Having quality video is important to today's houses of worship and it makes it possible for church members to continue to feel part of the congregation even when they're not physically there."

Medium-sized Churches: Integrating PTZs into the Existing Production Workflow

The medium and larger houses of worship they visited had more sophisticated workflows and higher production expectations. More specifically, the medium-sized church that they visited was using a mixture of broadcast, cinema, and PTZ cameras for IMAG and live streaming. Since the church was using older technology, this approach left something to be desired—there were differences in image quality that was said to be somewhat distracting for attendees. Given the age of the PTZs used at the church, there was a surveillance camera-like look and feel to the imagery, and the production quality simply did not compare with the higher resolution and larger image sensors found in the church's broadcast and cinema cameras. Integrating older video equipment with newer gear is a common challenge for any part of the production chain, not just cameras. PTZs have come a long way, with many modern solutions available with broadcast-quality video and sophisticated control systems, making it possible to seamlessly switch between PTZ and handheld cameras. With much improved HD and 4K video and SRT or NDI compatibility now common in most leading PTZs, houses of worship can easily integrate new, cost-effective equipment with their existing high-end broadcast solutions.

Large Churches: Manned Versus Unmanned

As expected, the larger worship environment had the highest production value of the three. In this instance, PTZ cameras had been part of this church's workflow for the better part of 15 years. These older solutions were recently removed and sold to other churches due to the limited zoom range, jumpy movements, sensitive zoom speed and difficulty controlling the cameras. With other types of cameras and ample volunteer camera operators available, the church thought it was simply easier to replace the old PTZs with manned cameras.

While many venues prefer the human element of having manned cameras for their productions, PTZ cameras enable placement capabilities that provide a unique perspective, which can't be achieved with a handheld camera. PTZs are also great for churches with limited operators to help manage all the points of view needed to best capture the service or event.

The Evolution of the PTZ

"Overall, the meetings were extremely enlightening and productive," says Blackmore. "While PTZ cameras have come a long way in recent years, it seems the newer features are lesser known in the house of worship industry. There are cameras on the market now with impressive zoom capabilities and robotics that are more fluid, but the PTZ's reputation as a glorified security camera is something that persists in some markets — especially those that previously used them in such a capacity. However, it's important to remember that PTZs can complement sophisticated production environments."

"Though some people might still think of security cameras when they see a PTZ, there are many industries where these solutions are becoming the standard for video production," adds D'Amico. "We have seen significant growth in the use of PTZ cameras for sports and other live event productions. This is because PTZs make it possible for operators to get in close without physically obstructing the view of the field or stage to the in-person viewers — a benefit that would be especially useful in houses of worship of all sizes."

In the future, contributors to the joint initiative will be offering updates, recommendations, and best practices for how PTZ cameras can be better utilized in the worship environment.

As an extension of this PTZ Initiative, JVC Professional Video, a division of JVC Kenwood USA Corporation, is launching the Aspire Program, which will supply a multi-camera PTZ streaming system from JVC to a church that is currently not streaming. This can be a house of worship that would like to begin streaming or one that has suffered a setback (fire, theft, etc.) that currently prevents them from doing so.

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