

How CityLight Church Scaled Its Sound

How one church transformed its audio to support a growing congregation

CityLight Church built a production platform worthy of its mission - transforming a scrappy setup into a scalable, volunteer-friendly system delivering clarity, consistency, and confident growth.

CityLight Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, has always known how to make things work.

Before its recent move, the growing congregation worshiped in a century-old building where audio infrastructure was more improvisation than installation. Long XLR runs disappeared through floors. Quarter-inch lines snaked across ceilings. Overflow rooms were stitched together however they could be.

"When you talk about a church being scrappy, we're a very MacGyver church," laughs Alex Neill, Production Director. "You make what you have work. We were running XLRs from the snake on the back of the stage through the floor into the basement. It was nuts."

That grit fueled CityLight's growth - especially its college ministry. Located within walking distance of the University of Nebraska campus, the church now draws 700-800 students weekly, launching this year's ministry with an eye-opening 1,350 students on opening night.

"They were maxed out," says Zach Lahm of HouseRight, the system integrator. "Channel count, bus count - everywhere."

Then came the moment that made change unavoidable.

"Two of them - because the first one blew up," Neill says of the church's previous consoles. "It literally started smoking in the middle of the service."

At that point, reliability wasn't optional. Scalability wasn't aspirational. And volunteer-friendly operation moved from a nice-to-have to a hard requirement.

Choosing the Right Platform

HouseRight guided CityLight through demos and system design conversations, ultimately landing on a Yamaha DM7-EX mixing console as the centerpiece of a fully networked audio ecosystem. The system includes NEXO P+ Series loudspeakers, a processor for building DSP, Shure QLX-D wireless integrated directly into the console, and Dante transport throughout.

"We presented multiple options," Lahm explains. "Yamaha made sense - enough channel count for today, with room to grow tomorrow. And it could live in the hands of volunteers."

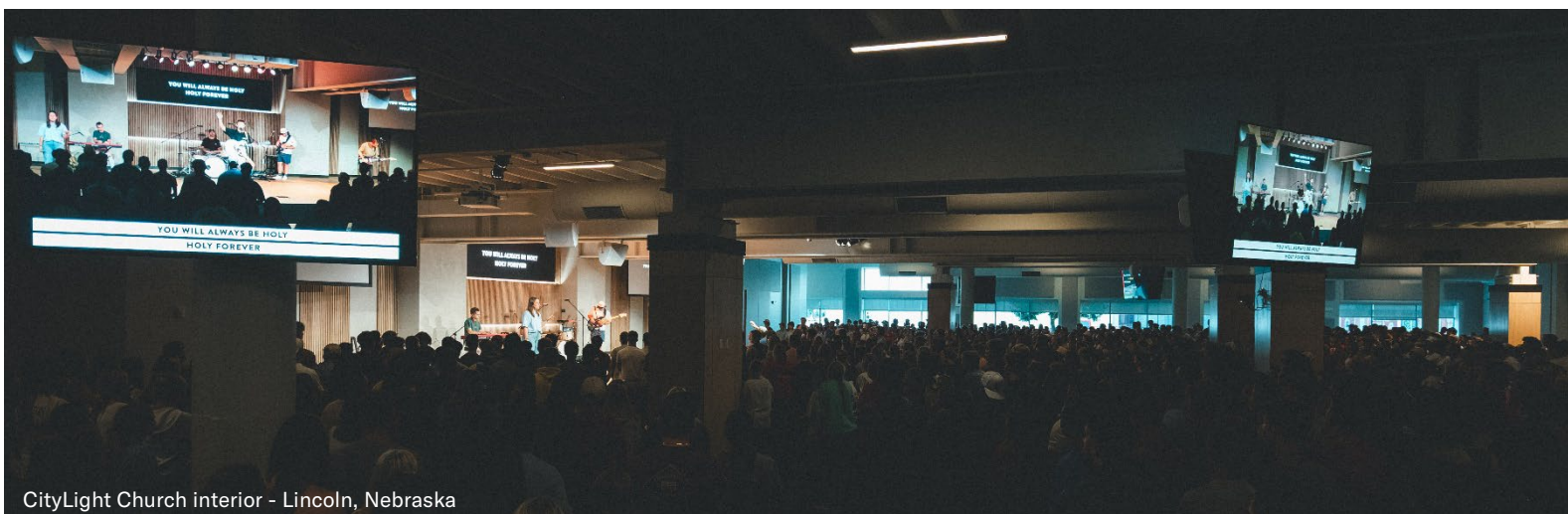
Flexibility sealed the deal. "With DM7, if they want to be super organized with scenes and automation, they can," Lahm says. "If they want to run and gun, they can. That's a long-term win for this church." "The customizability, the visuals, the premium effects - it's awesome," Neill says. "I look at the board every day and find something new."

From day one, the difference was obvious. "It's literally night and day," Neill says.

"Training someone on routing - 'see this button? You can tell it to be a different button if you want.' You can make it whatever you want."

Dante opened doors the team had never walked through before. "We didn't have Dante previously," Neill says. "Now it's plug in, select the device - easy as that."

One volunteer-mind-blowing workflow quickly became a favorite: cloning a single input to multiple channels for different vocalists.



CityLight Church interior - Lincoln, Nebraska

“We’ll put the same Dante input on another channel with a different EQ for that person,” Neill explains. “It blew our volunteers’ minds.”

Custom faders and split mode are now everyday tools. “If you don’t want to see an empty mic channel, make it an effects channel,” he says. “Control the effect right there. The custom faders are my favorite thing.” Separate show files for Sunday services, Tuesday college nights, and special worship events ensure nothing gets overwritten. “Good news,” Neill adds with a grin. “The DM7 lets you do that.”

Loudspeaker Strategy: Sightlines, SPL, and Clarity

The new worship space - a repurposed 100-plus-year-old car manufacturing building - presented both opportunity and challenge. Coverage uniformity, clarity, and visual impact were all non-negotiable.

“We demoed multiple manufacturers,” Lahm says. “NEXO was selected based on sightline concerns, the output they needed, the clarity they wanted, and overall value. The church heard the demos and chose NEXO.”

The payoff is consistent sonic fidelity and SPL from front row to back wall - critical for worship moments that build energy and engagement. “In our old building, we had two PA speakers and two subwoofers,” Neill says. “Now, people in the back get the exact same experience as the people in front. It’s night and day.”

As volunteers learned the room’s acoustical quirks - dead zones, feedback pockets - the DM7’s visual tools, Dynamic EQ, and premium onboard processing became powerful allies. “I told a volunteer, ‘Let me blow your mind with what a secondary Dynamic EQ looks like,’” Neill says. “The onboard premium effects are amazing.”



Main stage, NEXO P+ Series loudspeakers

In-Ear Monitoring: Clean Stage, Total Control

CityLight wanted a clean, modern stage - no wired packs, no personal mixer boxes.

“All of their in-ear monitoring is RF-based,” Lahm notes, pointing to Shure PSM 900 systems. “If you truly want a clean stage and maximum control, Yamaha’s ecosystem is a fantastic solution.”

Musicians immediately felt the difference.

“Our worship resident came up and said, ‘I just found out you can make groups in MonitorMix on your phone - and it saves even if you change packs,’” Neill recalls. “Total game changer.”

Even when internet connectivity falters, the console can take over IEM management seamlessly. Dante also unlocked new flexibility, allowing click and guide tracks - once locked together - to be split into discrete controls per mix.



DM7-EX centerpiece of a fully networked audio ecosystem

And when a nonprofit gala demanded more packs than usual? Stage returns and spare wired options filled the gap without compromising the clean-stage philosophy.

Integration That Empowers Volunteers

At CityLight, production isn’t support - it’s leadership.

“I tell everyone serving in the booth: you’re leading worship just as much as the people on stage,” Neill says.

That philosophy shaped the install and the training that followed. Volunteers helped hang Yamaha architectural speakers - VXH pendants in the café, VXC models in cry rooms and hallways - and HouseRight hosted a multi-station training night.



NEXO P+ Series loudspeakers

“We literally had like 40 people,” Neill says. “They explained every piece of the rack. I asked one of our volunteers how the DM7 worked - he told me exactly.”

Two weeks after opening, Neill left for his honeymoon.

“I didn’t get a phone call,” he says. “Nobody called me because something broke. That’s how well HouseRight trained our team.”

Proof in the Pews

Sometimes the most meaningful feedback comes from non-technical ears.

“In the middle of the 8:30 service, our co-pastor walked in and said, ‘I didn’t know it could sound this good,’” Neill remembers. “He could immediately tell the difference.”

With tuned PA, intentional lighting, and tasteful effects, CityLight now crafts worship experiences instead of hoping for them.

Broadcast - and What’s Next

CityLight currently streams via Resi, sending program audio straight from the DM7 console - another example of the system’s seamless integration. The team is now exploring dedicated broadcast mixes and auto-mixing features.

“We want people to be in community,” Neill says, “but I want the stream to sound great too. I’m still learning - and that’s exciting.”

Hope is Not a Plan

“Hope isn’t a plan,” Neill says. “Preparation and execution create those moments.” Lahm’s advice is simple: bring in a partner early. “We were contracted before the architect,” he says. “That let the church dream - what aren’t you doing today that you’d love to do in the next space?” For Neill, the lesson is even clearer. “The number one priority isn’t the equipment - it’s your volunteers,” he says. “Are you equipping them with training?”

With manufacturer education, integrator coaching, and a console and audio system built for clarity and control, CityLight Church now has a production platform worthy of its mission - and a team ready to steward it.



CityLight features Yamaha VXH pendants in café, VXC models in rooms and hallways