Full Participation in the Mass

Audio enhancements at The Basilica

JULIE CRAVEN

One of the pillars of The Basilica Restoration Plan is enhancing the sacred experience by improving acoustics and upgrading audio equipment. Hearing the elements of the Mass is essential to full participation and connection to the liturgy. The quality of sound shapes the experience of coming to The Basilica of Saint Mary at its core. When it becomes difficult to hear the music or the Gospel clearly, it can create a disconnect from the worship experience.

To address these needs, The Basilica has contracted with Kirkegaard, a design and consulting firm specializing in architectural acoustics and integrated systems. With a portfolio of nearly 3,000 successful projects worldwide — including auditoria, concert halls, theaters, schools of music and the arts, recording and broadcast studios, libraries, churches, and other acoustically sensitive environments — Kirkegaard brings deep expertise to this work.

Kirkegaard began the audio assessment

Kirkegaard team testing various types of monitors, speakers, and microphones in The Basilica, May 6-7, 2025.

in 2024 and has since made several site visits throughout the process. They are addressing audio challenges identified by parishioners, including "dead zones," muffled sound, and the need for an upgraded listening-device system for those with hearing loss.

Patrick Schneider, Director of Music at The Basilica, reflected on the process: "Working with the team has been a thorough and thoughtful process that has incorporated the entire music staff to develop the best plan for our needs. We reviewed different types of choral microphones and lector microphones for both the sung and spoken word."

On May 6–7, 2025, Kirkegaard's Jeff Human and Clay Benning led a two-day evaluation at The Basilica, comparing speaker systems and microphone options. They also reviewed microphone quality and placement, recommending a more directional pulpit microphone and improved piano and choir miking techniques. Musical and liturgical tests were carried out with lectors, contemporary ensembles, cantors, and choirs to ensure the system meets the needs of a wide variety of services.

Beyond loudspeakers, the site visit included a review of The Basilica's audio infrastructure. Additional improvements were proposed for microphone positions, cable routing, and audio equipment organization. Kirkegaard also presented a preliminary phased audio/visual design, noting that the system must be flexible, support diverse liturgical and musical needs, and preserve the church's historic architecture. The design includes concepts and cost estimates covering the sanctuary, nave, crossing, pulpit, apse choir, gallery choir loft, narthex, sacristy, and plaza.

The next steps in the process will identify the specific equipment and timelines needed for the project. As The Basilica advances through the larger restoration plan, the audio improvements will be considered after the completion of the stone, plaster, and painting work — ensuring that both the visual and auditory experiences of worship are renewed for generations to come.

Julie Craven is a parish member and Marketing Chair at The Basilica.