: 10.07.2026: McKnight AV / Worship Needs – Defining Requirements Before Solutions

From: M Bret Blackford (bret_blackford@yahoo.com)

To: aowens@mcknightcrossings.org

Cc: kmyers@mcknightcrossings.org; jmcglawn@mcknightcrossings.org; ddaniel@mcknightcrossings.org; bret_blackford@yahoo.com

Date: Wednesday, October 7, 2026 at 04:16 PM CDT

Andrew et al,

Thanks, and your priorities line up pretty closely with where I've landed after looking at the current system, the consultant proposal, and the available digital boards.

My current recommendation would be to focus first on **Allen & Heath**, with the **SQ-6 as the best overall fit for McKnight** and the **SQ-5 as the best-value alternative**.

The biggest reasons are:

- good support for scenes/presets and repeatable Sunday operation;
- ability to create a **simplified volunteer workflow** so operators can handle normal fader and mute changes without needing access to deeper EQ/routing settings;
- **iPad control**;
- plenty of channel capacity for what we have now and future growth;
- a platform that both consultants independently appear to have been comfortable recommending.

Cignal's proposal specifically called for an Allen & Heath SQ-6, so this would not be us heading in a completely different direction. Your note that both people who provided bids also suggested Allen & Heath reinforces that.

Here is how I would currently compare the main options:

Option	Approx. console price	Migration from Mackie 2404	Volunteer fit	My take
Allen & Heath SQ-5	**$3,999**	Moderate	Very good once configured	Best value
Allen & Heath SQ-6	**$4,999**	Moderate	Excellent	**Best overall for MX**
Yamaha DM3-D	~$2,266	Moderate	Very good	Attractive, but less physical surface/channel headroom
Behringer WING Compact	~$2,799	Moderate–high	Powerful, but more complex	Great value, perhaps more complexity than MX needs
A&H CQ-20B	~$1,000	Easy technically	App-centered	Too dependent on tablet control for your main FOH console

The SQ-5 and SQ-6 use the same basic platform and have plenty of processing capacity. The practical advantage of the SQ-6 is the larger physical control surface with more faders available at once and less need for volunteers to switch between layers. Since one of our main goals is to make Sunday operation easier, I think that is probably worth the extra roughly $1,000 for a system we may use for many years.

I also think the migration from our current Mackie 2404-VLZ4 is very manageable, but I would not treat it as simply unplugging one board and plugging in another. The physical wiring may be straightforward; the important part is documenting what the Mackie is doing today and then recreating that correctly on the digital console: inputs, outputs, monitor mixes, livestream feed, gain structure, EQ, scenes, etc.

My preference would be to do the change during the week, leave enough time for a worship-team rehearsal, and keep the Mackie available as a fallback until we are confident everything is working. (But I am getting ahead of myself and we first need to agree on the appropriate digial soundboard replacement for our analogue system.)

I also do **not** think we necessarily need to pay a consultant to do the entire installation. I suspect we can handle much of this internally if Brian Hill and Jeff McGlawn and others are comfortable doing the migration.

Where outside help might be worthwhile is the initial **configuration/commissioning**:

- gain structure;
- EQ and dynamics;
- monitor and livestream routing;
- creating the normal Sunday scenes/presets;
- setting up a simplified volunteer workflow;
- final room tuning and troubleshooting.

In other words, I would lean toward a **hybrid approach**: we purchase/install/configure as much as we reasonably can in-house, then bring in someone experienced with the SQ platform for a few hours if needed to verify the setup and help train the operators.

Roughly, I would think about the project in these terms:

- SQ-6: about $5,000
- cables/accessories: perhaps $300–$750
- iPad, if we decide to dedicate one: perhaps $400–$700
- limited outside setup/training: perhaps $500–$1,500

So a basic SQ-6 conversion might be around **$6,000–$7,000**, while a more complete setup with a stage box and outside commissioning could move closer to **$8,000–$9,000**.

I would not automatically buy a stage box (like a DX168) on day one. If our existing analog snake/cabling already brings everything back to the booth cleanly, we may be able to connect the existing lines directly to the SQ-6 and make the first phase much simpler.

Training would still be important, but I think we should train at two levels:

1. **Sunday volunteer** — load the right scene, raise/lower channels, mute/unmute, make basic adjustments, and know what not to touch.
2. **Audio administrator** — gain, EQ, compression, routing, scenes, buses, network/iPad settings, and troubleshooting.

The digital board only becomes easier than the Mackie if we configure it intentionally so volunteers do not have to be audio engineers.

Separately, I think we can address the shotgun/ambient microphones as their own small project rather than making that part of the soundboard decision. There is broad agreement that better congregational audio would improve the livestream, and both consultants apparently suggested front-mounted shotgun microphones. Re_ 10.07.2026_ McKnight AV _ W…

We can evaluate microphone models, mounting locations, wiring, and cost on a parallel track. If we ultimately choose the SQ-5 or SQ-6, either console would easily accommodate those additional inputs. So I don't think we need to resolve the microphone question before deciding which soundboard is the best fit.

So my suggested next step would be to have Brian Hill and Jeff McGlawn help us compare **SQ-5 vs. SQ-6**, count every input/output we are currently using on the Mackie, and verify how the existing snake terminates. That should tell us pretty quickly whether this is basically a straightforward console-for-console replacement or whether we need a stage box and more extensive rewiring.

At this point, though, I would put **SQ-6 first** and SQ-5 second, while evaluating the ambient microphones separately and concurrently.

Jeff McGlawn - what are your thoughts?

---- Bret

On Wednesday, October 7, 2026 at 03:34:39 PM CDT, Andrew Owens <aowens@mcknightcrossings.org> wrote:

Totally agree with the assessment of starting with a digital board and adding congregation audio for streaming.

I know both people who gave bids suggested Alan and Heath for the soundboard. I've used a Behringer before and have no complaints.
My biggest things for this would be:

- system that makes it easier for volunteers to run (they can raise and mute people, but they can't go on the back end and set highs, lows, eqs, and such)
- ability to connect to iPad
- plenty of channels for what we have and possibility of growth

As for congregational sound for the streaming, both experts also suggested shotgun mics placed above the main speakers up front. The biggest thing to consider for this, whether this or another way of doing it, to me is the mounting/wiring and making sure if we are doing it ourselves, we know what we are doing. I'm all for doing it ourselves if we've done the research.

Anyways, I'd love to hear from everyone else, and if possible, meet up next week sometime about actual options.

Blessings,
Andrew

On Wed, Oct 7, 2026 at 2:39 PM M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

> All,
>
> It is difficult and overwhelming to swallow the elephant whole, so it is often better to take smaller, more manageable bites. I think the same is true with our AV needs.
>
> After talking with most of you and getting a sense of the priorities people are identifying, what I have heard most consistently is that **a **digital soundboard may be a good and relatively safe place to start****.
>
> A properly configured digital console could lower the barriers to entry for volunteers by allowing us to use documented scenes/presets, make normal Sunday operation more repeatable, and reduce dependence on a small number of people who understand the current analog system. It could also make it easier for the praise team to practice when needed without requiring specialized assistance.
>
> This also seems like an area where we have enough internal knowledge to evaluate options carefully and potentially handle much of the implementation ourselves.
>
> A second area that may be worth evaluating at the same time is ****ambient/congregational audio**** for the livestream. I think it would be useful to determine whether one or more appropriately placed directional microphones could provide a better representation of congregational singing and the room during worship. A front-mounted boom or directional microphone may be one relatively simple and reasonably priced option, potentially under $1,000, but I would want us to compare that with other approaches before deciding on a specific solution.
>
> So my recommendation would be to begin with:
> 1. evaluating possible digital replacements for our current analog soundboard; and
> 2. evaluating practical options for improving ambient/congregational audio.
>
> That does not mean we stop considering other worship AV needs—stage lighting, cameras, projectors, streaming workflow, etc. It simply gives us a manageable starting point on needs that seem to have broad agreement and where improvement could make a meaningful difference.
>
> As we discussed previously, I still think the guiding principle should be to define the need, identify the gap, and then evaluate the simplest and most economical technology that addresses it.
>
> I am including Devin as well because of his involvement with worship and his perspective on how the system is actually used.

Please let me know if you have any concerns or reservations about starting in these areas.

---- Bret

On Monday, October 5, 2026 at 01:28:26 PM CDT, Kaylynn Myers <kmyers@mcknightcrossings.org> wrote:

Hi Bret,

Thanks for reinitiating the conversation. I definitely agree that it makes sense to review and align on our goals and the reality of the situation before making a major investment. My primary priorities are to support our leaders/volunteers, and to keep the congregation connected and engaged.

It seems wise to do what we can to make volunteering to help run A/V less specialized so that a new or less tech-savvy volunteer could still feel equipped to help in this ministry with the right training. I don't want to burn out our current, very dedicated small volunteer base with stressful situations, for sure. And it would be ideal for the average involved leader, say Chris Fuller or Carrie Strickland, to be able to do things like turn on the sound board/computer, set up mics and screens, etc. if/when they are waiting for the trained people to show up.

As for the Livestream, I was recently recognized in public by someone who knew me from seeing me on our online feed. And I still think that it is primarily a way to keep homebound or traveling members to feel connected. If a prospective visitor is able to learn a little about us and be attracted to the fact that we're not a megachurch with a highly polished YouTube presence, all the better, IMO.

I did like that the projector yesterday seemed brighter and the images/lyrics easier to see, before the regular reboots started distracting during the sermon. I think our equipment is a worthwhile investment that will be used for many years, if the past is any indicator of the future.

I'll be here on Wednesday night. The worship team is practicing at 6, but should be wrapped up by about 7-7:30. I'm also coming up on Friday to set up for the Women's Prayer Breakfast around the middle of the day, and could get away before or after for a chat.

I appreciate everyone's perspective, care, and hard work!

Kaylynn

On Sun, Oct 4, 2026 at 7:11 PM M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:

> Also, FYI, I am trying to maintain MX AV documentation on this website - **https://av.mxcoc.xyz/index.html**
>
> On Sunday, October 4, 2026 at 01:25:53 PM CDT, M Bret Blackford <bret_blackford@yahoo.com> wrote:
>
> Andrew, Jeff McGlawn, Kaylynn,
>
> I'd like to find some time for us to meet and discuss McKnight's AV needs for Sunday worship.
>
> I think there are two related, but distinct, questions that we need to keep separate:
>
> **1. What do we want and need the Sunday worship experience to accomplish?**
> **2. What technology, equipment, processes and resources are needed to accomplish it?**
>
> Before we purchase equipment or engage consultants, I think we should first be clear about the requirements for #1.
>
> We have had similar discussions in the past, including the:
>
> - 2021 Assessment of Sunday Worship
> - 2023 MX AV Team Review
>
> Those documents are useful history, but I think it would be worthwhile to step back now and ask what our needs are **today**.
>
> For this initial discussion, I intentionally started with a small group focused primarily on the worship experience and current operational needs. Once we have a clearer understanding of what we want to accomplish, we can bring

in Brian and others with deeper technical expertise to help determine the best way to accomplish it.

As a starting point, I suggest we look at the following areas:

1. Support / Reliability

- Are our Sunday processes repeatable and reasonably easy to learn?
- Do we have adequate cross-training and backup?
- Where do we still have single points of failure?
- How quickly could we recover if a key piece of equipment failed?

2. Audio

- How does the room sound today?
- Are there recurring complaints or limitations?
- Is the current analog soundboard difficult to train volunteers on?
- Would a digital board improve repeatability, presets, troubleshooting and cross-training enough to justify a change?

3. Video / Presentation

- Are slides and other visual content sufficiently bright, clear and readable throughout the auditorium?
- How reliable and supportable are the current projectors?
- Are there things we want to display that the current system cannot handle well?

4. Streaming / Online Worship

- What do we want the livestream to accomplish?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Do we want primarily a clear sermon stream, or a more complete online worship experience?
- How easy is the current process for volunteers to operate and troubleshoot?

5. Lighting / Worship Environment

- Does our current lighting adequately support both in-person worship and video?
- Are the lighting controls easy enough for volunteers to operate consistently?
- Are there remaining limitations or pain points?

For each area, I think we should identify:

- what we ideally want,
- where we are today,
- what the actual gap is,
- how important that gap is, and
- what improvement would justify spending church resources.

For example, if our current projectors are producing a good image and can remain reliable with replacement lamps, then we should ask how much a new laser projector would actually improve the worship experience before spending perhaps $15,000–$20,000 or more. On the other hand, if reliability, image quality, supportability or volunteer operation is becoming a significant problem, replacement may make sense.

The same reasoning should apply to the soundboard, streaming equipment, lighting and other AV systems.

I don’t think the goal should be to have the newest technology. The goal should be to have technology that **reliably supports worship, is reasonably simple for volunteers to operate and support, and represents good stewardship of church resources.**

We can start brainstorming by email, then meet as a small group to discuss and prioritize the needs. Once we have those requirements reasonably defined, we can involve the broader AV team and, if appropriate, consultants or vendors to help translate those requirements into technical options, specifications and costs.

I would like us to leave this first discussion with a prioritized list of needs—not a list of equipment to buy.

In other words: **define the need, identify the gap, prioritize the gap, then evaluate technology and cost.**

---- Bret