

Renovate Your Church's Physical Soul with Furniture Restoration

By Jonathan Bentz

Restoration (noun) – a return of something to the former, original, normal, or unimpaired condition (Dictionary.com)

Some people step into church every Sunday looking for guidance. Some enter looking for meaning and understanding of what's going on around them. Others seek to find a “pick me up” or a spiritual recharge for the upcoming week.

Whatever reason people have for going to church, they all seek some type of spiritual restoration. While most churches provide this restoration with consideration to their congregation, their furniture often gets neglected.

Part of the security and sanctuary every worship hall provides comes from the feeling of tradition its design and furniture give to people. Tradition is important to churchgoers and a major benefit to the overall worship experience. Since so many members of the congregation spend most of their time sitting in pews and admiring other wooden furniture, the condition of all church furniture is important to the church experience.

If maintaining tradition is important to your church and one of your messages each week involves getting things back to the way “they used to be,” then keeping your generations-old furniture in great shape is vital. Most people can look at wooden furniture and tell that it needs maintenance. Deciding between restoration, new furniture, or simply refinishing is tough with budgets being tight.

Buying New Furniture, Refinishing, or Restoring

When churches consider making improvements to their seating, it is a major financial decision. The three options most churches have to choose between are buying new furniture, refinishing their current furniture, or fully restoring old furniture to its original condition. Regardless of what your church decides is best, any furniture older than 30 years will likely require some form of replacement or improvement. Finish of the wood and condition of the cap rails are also two things to look over when evaluating your furniture.

“There are a variety of reasons to restore church furniture other than what the eye can see,” said Fredrick Taggart, president of Fredrick & Emily's, a provider of church renovation services since 1976. “In many cases, the value of improving furniture is more important than the physical attributes of the furniture itself.”

New church furniture is manufactured in a very competitive marketplace. Often, the competition creates a business culture where new products are manufactured on an assembly line. These products frequently lack the same craftsmanship as older pews and seating. Assembly line production can't provide the same unique, high-quality materials at a competitive price. With most manufactures the custom tailoring that many woodworkers designed on church furniture in the past is also lost. Every church is one-of-a-kind, and church members are reminded of that each week when they realize the furniture they sit in is also unique.

Having furniture refinished is a good choice for churches interested in keeping their old furniture while saving on some of the cost. However, refinishing doesn't involve any repair of the existing furniture foundation. Instead, refinishing simply restores the “shine” of the furniture. Refinishing is a good idea

if furniture isn't squeaking, loose or cracking, but looks aged. Even if your pews continue to shine, however, refinishing may need to be done if the clothes of your congregation stick to seating during humid summer Sundays. This sticky condition comes from the chemicals in the finish breaking down.

Church furniture restoration involves full repair and renovation of the entire wooden structure. While it is **more time-intensive and costly**, the investment required for restoration can extend the life of church furniture for generations. Advancements in joinery, fasteners and wood finishing over the years have drastically improved the **structural integrity restorers** can provide wooden church furniture and can greatly extend its life.

“There is a significant difference between refinishing and complete restoration of church furniture,” said Taggart. “Most companies that try to do the 'restoration' process on-site are taking shortcuts and probably only doing light refinishing. While this will cost less, the results will not last as long.”

Tips for Maintaining and Extending Furniture Life

While restoration companies carry the expertise necessary to properly renovate church furniture, their employees aren't the only people qualified to work on extending the life of old pews. Like the wood furniture people keep in their homes, church furniture needs routine care to maintain their look for a long time.

Most church members aren't aware that there are many kinds of preventative maintenance they can do themselves to extend the life of their furniture. Frequent dusting and thorough annual cleaning can really go a long way to keeping wooden furniture looking new for many years.

In addition to those common chores, Taggart also has a list of 10 things churches can do to extend the life of their pews that he frequently shares with clients.

- * Avoid exposing furniture to direct sunlight.
- * Maintain a consistent room temperature.
- * Protect furniture from excess moisture.
- * Protect wood from extreme dry conditions.
- * **Dust furniture routinely with water, not polishes**
- * **Don't use product with propellants (aerosols).**
- * Treat furniture annually with fine liquid furniture oil, like Old English.
- * Make sure the cloth you use to dust and treat furniture is cotton-based.
- * Thoroughly clean the back caps and ends once a year with a mild detergent, like Murphy's Oil Soap.
- * Keep church pews anchored tightly to the floor.

Jonathan Bentz is a freelance writer who spent three years with the Associated Press. Now he writes articles online for a variety of clients across industries.

Dedicated to the spiritual vision of each church they renovate, Fredrick & Emily's has provided restoration and renovation services to churches nationwide for more than 30 years, www.fredrickandemilys.com.