

Cathedral Seating FAQ

Everyone will have a seat here.

The decision to have chairs in the nave was a lay-led process.

Last spring, the vestry was approached with a request to consider new seating options for the cathedral nave. The vestry then put together a task force to research all seating options, including our current pews and new seating. Michael Vente, our Junior Warden, chaired the task force, which was made up of members from the vestry and Arts & Architecture and included an equal number of people who preferred pews, people who preferred chairs, and people who were neutral. The task force selected parishioners to participate in focus groups to inform their conversations with opinions from the congregation. After much research and discussions, the task force unanimously voted to recommend that the vestry move forward with acquiring chairs for the nave. The vestry approved this recommendation and asked the Arts & Architecture Commission to take over selecting the design of the chairs, which they are currently finalizing.

The old pews are in disrepair.

Once the old pews were removed for the HVAC construction, the task force learned that the pews were in bad shape. Many had cracks in the seat that ran the length of the pews, the finish was worn off along the backs and the tops where they were frequently touched, and many of the kneelers were broken. The pews that extended behind the columns were very long and were in two pieces, connected by a support foot, and these connection points were splintered. The task force inquired furniture manufacturers to see if the pews could be refurbished, and they all said that fixing the pews wouldn't be successful. It would be an expensive and short-term solution.

The old pews were built in 1911 and don't align with best seating practices in 2021.

During their research, the task force learned that the spacing between the pews was too close at 32.5", and the seat height at 16" and seat depth at 15" were too short for today's standard specifications. After getting the opinions of manufacturers and learning about proper seating dimensions, the task force decided to eliminate the option to keep the current pews and move forward with discussing getting new pews or new chairs.

The plan for the new configuration is to provide enough space in between rows so that people can get up and easily walk in front of the other people sitting in the row to go to the restroom, receive communion, or retrieve children from Children's Chapel. While this does lower our capacity in the cathedral, we're going to be fine for Sunday services, and we'll bring in additional chairs for our larger services, as we always have. The additional spacing between rows was a necessary change regardless of pews or chairs.

The key principles that guided the task force's decision were flexibility, accessibility, and comfort.

To follow code, pews have to be bolted to the floor and chairs do not. The flexibility that chairs offer allows us to arrange the chairs in different configurations for certain services or events as well as the ability to completely remove the chairs to have a large gathering space for community events. Some examples include a service in the round, seating configurations at the Wilderness service that reflect the theme or readings in a season, music concerts, community dinners, charity events and fundraisers, and other performance events such as Mile High Theology.

In the past, our parishioners and visitors in wheelchairs had to sit on the side aisle, often behind a column. We'll now be able to remove chairs to allow those in wheelchairs to choose where they want to sit within the congregation.

Chairs make it clear how many people can comfortably fit in a row. While pews do offer an adjustable capacity, chairs are more welcoming to newcomers because when the church is largely full, chairs make it possible for a person to know exactly where an available seat is.

The chairs will be traditional and custom-built for our nave.

As part of their research, the task force engaged in conversations with church furniture manufacturers and received examples of available designs for pews and chairs. Many of the pew designs were unattractive and modern-looking and the decent options were very expensive. The chair designs were more customizable and traditional. After making the decision to move forward with chairs, the task force narrowed it down to two manufacturers to recommend to the Arts & Architecture Commission to work with on the final design of the chair.

The Arts & Architecture Commission is still finalizing the design of the chair, but we know it will be traditional, have individual kneelers on each chair, include a space for prayer books and hymnals, be stackable for easier storage, and be custom-built for our nave.

While our chairs are being built, we will use transitional chairs in the nave.

In the interim, the chairs we'll use will look much like the chairs we've been using for our Morning Prayer service on All Souls' Walk.

Arts & Architecture is working on a plan to repurpose the pews that are still in decent shape.

While most of the pews cannot be refinished and refurbished, there are a few pews that were in less popular areas in the nave that are less worn and in decent shape. The Arts & Architecture Commission is working to see if any of those pews can be used and if any of the wood from the other pews can be repurposed.

A donor from the parish is covering the full cost of the new chairs for the cathedral.

An anonymous donor is covering the cost of the chairs. This household was not involved in the task force's decision-making process, and they wanted to gift our cathedral new seating for the nave regardless of the final decision and design.

Our old pews are more than just the place you sit for services. These pews are soaked in prayers, tears, laughter, and memories, and that's hard to let go of. Because the pews were in such bad shape, they had to be replaced with something new. We know this is a hard change for so many, but we have the opportunity to make new memories in the cathedral and mold these chairs into the fabric of our community.