

Faithfully Financed

**Good Stewardship of Technology Spending
through Managed IT Services**

THE BALANCING ACT

Meet Sarah Martinez, the Parish Tech Steward at St. Francis Catholic Church, facing a conundrum. As the head of IT in the parish, Sarah was tasked with overseeing the annual budget, ensuring the seamless operation of the church's digital infrastructure.

St. Francis Catholic Church was experiencing growth, with new members regularly joining the parish. Ministries were bustling with activity, catering to parishioners and extending their reach to the broader community. Generosity in giving was on the rise, mirroring the expansion in all areas.

Yet, nestled in the budget was a persistent concern for Sarah – the IT expenses. Unlike annual giving, it was increasing at a faster rate, posing a challenge that demanded attention. Since the pivotal year of 2020, Sarah has recognized the role of the church's digital infrastructure in maintaining connections with parishioners and fostering future growth. She acknowledged the necessity of ongoing investment in IT but was acutely aware of the need to rein in the unforeseen expenses that repeatedly eluded the budget.

Sarah was committed to enhancing the church's technological capabilities. She understood that technology was vital for engaging the parish and the community. However, gaining control over the expenditures related to the digital infrastructure remained a critical task. Drawing from the church's savings every time an unexpected cost surfaced was not a sustainable solution.

The dilemma faced by Sarah mirrored that of her counterparts in other parishes. While her story is fictional, it resonates with real challenges experienced by Catholic communities across the country post-2020.

But there's hope. With a managed IT services partnership, your parish can bring stability to the IT budget and ensure a predictable future for your church tech needs. This guide identifies the potential pitfalls that may be impacting your IT budget today and outlines the big benefits of a managed IT solution for your parish.



7 Hidden Costs of Parish IT

Your parish likely has a line item in its budget for IT costs. When you see it, maybe you think of the initial cost of hardware for the parish—the new computers for your workstations. You probably think of your internet and web hosting costs. But your IT budget is like an iceberg. Many of the most significant costs—the ones that make or break your budget—are below the surface. Here are seven examples.



STAFF

When considering various budgetary factors, staff expenses may not be the first to come to mind. Yet, as part of your routine budgeting, you're likely familiar with accounting for staff-related costs, including insurance and other benefits. It's an integral aspect of managing the finances of the parish, ensuring that a dedicated team is well-supported and equipped to serve the community effectively.

But some tech staff costs still inevitably surprise come as a surprise. Some of those might be:

- **Specialized skill requirements:** As technology becomes more complex, churches find getting increasingly specific about their skill needs is important. Years ago, it was easy to hire technology generalists. Today, those positions rarely exist. Hiring tech specialists comes with costs you may not be prepared for.
- **Uneven staffing needs:** Technology staffing needs are not constant. During specific seasons and when you're upgrading equipment, you'll have bigger needs for IT staff. It's too expensive to staff at those levels all year. Plus, it's hard to find extra staff who can work for only a few weeks at a time.
- **Turnover:** It's not uncommon for churches to go through IT staff quickly, especially if they tend to hire people at entry level. Turnover is expensive. Not only are you paying for the hiring process over again, but you'll also have to train new staff (or send them elsewhere for training at a cost). Turnover inevitably leads to gaps in service as you find new staff and get them ready for the position.





TRAINING

Your IT staff needs the ability to stay up to date on emerging technologies. As you know, the tech space is constantly changing. While all positions need to have budgets for training, the need is critical for your tech team. You can't afford your IT team to miss an important security update or be unaware of the latest software.

Plus, the need for IT training never goes away. Your tech team may need to participate in training every year to stay up to date. You'll likely find the training doesn't come cheap either.

COMPLIANCE

Being a church doesn't exempt you from the importance of maintaining compliance with state and federal laws, especially those concerning data security. These regulations are dynamic and evolve with the growing role of technology in our lives. Understanding and staying abreast of the tech-related regulations applicable to churches may pose a challenge, particularly if you are not already familiar with the existing legal framework.

DATA BACKUP

Every church needs a reliable, secure offsite backup. You might understand this at some level, but much more goes into a secure backup than you expect. Depending on your solution, you may have hardware, cloud storage, software licensing, management and maintenance costs, and additional security. Those costs add up.

DATA SECURITY

Every church today is a data steward. People give churches enormous access to personal data. Depending on how your parish handles certain activities, you might store credit card information, phone numbers, counseling notes, email addresses, and more.

Ensuring the security of your parish's data is crucial to safeguarding individuals and maintaining a positive public image. Additionally, an increasing number of legal entities are holding organizations accountable for their data-handling practices. While some laws may currently offer exemptions for non-profits, it's worth noting that not all do, and there is a possibility that more states may include non-profits in the future.





HARDWARE CARE & UPDATES

You know we are dealing with a dynamic tech landscape. Even if they are state-of-the-art, the computers you acquire today may not remain current beyond four years. Even with a 25 percent hardware replacement cycle each year, there's a need for a substantial annual investment to ensure your technology remains up-to-date.

It's important to note that even the hardware you retain requires regular maintenance for optimal performance. While these maintenance costs accumulate, they contribute to the overall upkeep of your technology.

TECH FAILURE

Occasionally, technology encounters challenges. Computers may experience crashes, and crucial data might be lost. Security measures can be breached.

When such events occur, there are associated costs, some of which are evident. For instance, a website going offline can lead to missed donations. However, it's equally important to consider the impact on overall productivity when IT hardware experiences downtime. Consider how tech failures may hinder your ability to meet internal and external parish needs.

Downtime also affects staff productivity, especially considering the likelihood of having a lean staff. Addressing frequent network outages and hardware issues is essential to ensure that your staff can perform their duties efficiently.



Why Parishes Choose Managed Tech

Recognizing that a Catholic parish operates with unique priorities that transcend financial concerns, we understand the importance of stewarding resources wisely. While your primary focus is on matters of eternal significance, the practical aspect of managing a budget is crucial for continuous service to your parish and the community.

It's common for parishes to aspire to engage in extensive ministry with limited resources. Here, managed IT solutions can come into play, offering assistance in clearly navigating your IT budget. This allows you to direct your energy towards what's important – creating opportunities for encounters with Christ and forming intentional disciples.

A managed tech solution is a third-party company you partner with to provide part or all of your IT needs. You pay a set monthly price, and they provide the needed services. Those services vary, depending on the company and your needs. They can include everything from hardware and software to digital security and ISP services. Most will allow you to pick and choose the services you need.



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SEVEN REASONS TO CONSIDER A MANAGED TECH SOLUTION

IMPROVED SECURITY

With a managed tech solution, you can stay ahead of the malevolent characters online. You have data—financial and parish records, etc.—to protect. Data security is critically important to the people you're serving and those you want to reach.

Managed tech solutions allow you to have experts in charge of your technology who understand these security needs. Choosing the appropriate partner ensures they implement the latest defenses to protect your important information from threats.

A CONSISTENT LINE ITEM

Establish a steady budget allocation by incorporating a managed tech solution, converting one of the less predictable budgetary components into a reliable one. This approach allows you to anticipate technology expenses, enabling more strategic resource allocation for core ministry initiatives. Opting for a managed tech solution involves a fixed monthly payment for a defined set of services, regardless of unforeseen circumstances like tech crashes. This arrangement spares you from additional replacement costs in the event of a technological malfunction.

ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

In an ever-evolving tech landscape, securing world-class IT support becomes imperative. However, acquiring top-notch IT talent can pose challenges within the constraints of a parish budget. Opting for a managed tech solution offers the opportunity to collaborate with professionals with extensive experience in the current tech tools and those anticipated in the future.

Moreover, aligning with a managed tech solution specializing in churches and religious non-profits ensures access to tech pros who understand the technology at hand and are also attuned to your specific use cases. This tailored expertise enhances the effectiveness of tech support for the unique needs of our parish community.





SCALEABILITY

As your parish aspires to expand, the prospect of growth introduces new challenges, especially in the realm of information technology.

The evolution of your church necessitates adapting processes and strategies, which, in turn, demands additional IT staff equipped with diverse skill sets. Opting for a managed tech solution ensures that your technology is poised to meet the demands of tomorrow right from the outset, facilitating a seamless alignment with your evolving needs and growth objectives.

A PROACTIVE APPROACH

With managed IT, your parish has the opportunity to take a proactive approach to tech challenges rather than a reactive one. By looking ahead to anticipate future needs, you can be well-prepared for whatever comes your way. Given the dynamic nature of technology, readiness is key.

Recognizing your myriad responsibilities in serving your parish community's needs, a managed tech solution alleviates the stress of dealing with technology-related concerns, allowing you to focus on your primary mission.

SAVING TIME AND MONEY

Streamline your approach to IT management by considering an alternative to maintaining an in-house IT team. You can leverage shared IT expertise with other parishes, allowing you to benefit from robust support at a minimal investment. By pooling resources and expertise, you can reduce costs without compromising service quality, and you'll likely gain access to additional services.

DEPENDABILITY

Technology can be a powerful accelerant to your parish mission. But when your tech crashes, it can set you back.

With a managed tech solution, your parish IT system gets full coverage care, including regular updates and maintenance, so that you can avoid work stoppages. You'll also find robust backup and recovery plans so that when your church or community has a crisis, you'll have the IT tools you need to support those you serve.





BY THE NUMBERS

2-5%

The average amount of annual budget allocated to IT expenses by non-profits or churches

70%

The percentage of non-profits that are currently using or planning to use cloud-based solutions for their IT needs

43%

The percentage of cyberattacks targeting small businesses and non-profits

40%

The percentage of non-profits using some form of managed IT services



An Efficient and Effective Partner

There are clear advantages to using a managed IT solution for your parish's technological needs. It's crucial to consider a trusted partner with a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by religious organizations.

Higher Ground Managed IT has over two decades of experience delivering world-class tech services tailored to churches.

Choosing Higher Ground means entrusting your parish with a seasoned team that comprehensively understands the intricacies of church technology. With a commitment to excellence and a deep understanding of the distinct requirements of faith-based organizations, Higher Ground Managed IT can provide you with the support needed to enhance your technological infrastructure and propel your mission forward.

Here are a few ways Higher Ground can support your parish.

SUBSCRIPTION-BASED

Higher Ground can replace or supplement your parish's IT staff. You pay a simple monthly subscription for many services, and Higher Ground takes care of everything else. You choose the services that are most important to you, including:

- Help desk support
- Network monitoring
- Patch management
- Anti-virus
- Backup & disaster relief

Higher Ground does all of this remotely without the need for on-site support.



WORLD-CLASS

Each parish has unique IT needs, even churches of a similar size have different missions and different ways they employ IT to achieve that mission. Higher Ground offers services tailored to your unique needs:

- Network server hardware and virtualization
- Network infrastructure
- Security evaluations and risk mitigation
- Computer workstations
- Enterprise wireless systems
- VoIP phone systems (cloud or on-premises)
- Email spam-filtering
- Backup solutions
- Software licensing

Partnering with Higher Ground for these services allows your parish to focus on its mission without IT concerns.





CONSULTING

Higher Ground can also walk with your parish as you use technology strategically in the context of your mission. Higher Ground Consulting can help your parish:

- Determine the networking services, switches, routers, and firewalls you need to meet your ministry goals.
- Select the right VoIP phone system and customizable options for your church.
- Help you pick the right workstations and laptops for maximum staff effectiveness.

But that's just the beginning. Think of Higher Ground as the technology ministry partner your parish needs for the future.

Peace of mind, Proactive Support

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Higher Ground Managed IT has provided hosting and managed services to Catholic organizations for over 20 years. We know security is a top concern, equipping staff and volunteers with the best systems and equipment is necessary, and having expertise and support available is crucial for operations. Higher Ground provides the stability, dependability, and scalability required for parishes, dioceses, and schools to operate safely and effectively



Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). But we don't just know technology and software, we know how to help you put it to best use to keep parishioners engaged, feeling welcome, and tending to their pastoral needs. We are evolving and changing to meet the changing needs of the Church. We're with you every step of the way.

Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the challenges you and your staff face every week.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of parish and diocese staff, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.

We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples who are formed and confident in sharing their faith with others. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

We believe in YOU!

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology—it can be intimidating! But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

(800) 736-7425

acstcatholic.com