

Appendix C

Computer Software Programs for Churches

Many churches are finding that a computerized accounting system works well for them. Numerous software packages are available, ranging from generic business programs to customized, church-specific ones.

If you are thinking about converting to a computer system for your church, we recommend that you follow these steps:

Step 1 – Define your needs. What kind of records do you want the computer to keep?

- Stewardship, to record and report individual pledges and giving, and to provide summary information by account number.
- General ledger, to record all income and expenses, and to provide periodic reports, usually monthly.
- Church attendance, committees, spiritual gifts inventories, etc. A general database for the church, providing various information on church members and adherents.
- Word processing and desktop publishing, used for church communications, weekly worship bulletin preparation, and sermon preparation, etc.
- Other uses such as Bible study programs, property management and inventory, library and music filing, or graphics.

Step 2 – Determine what software best suits the church’s needs. Where multiple packages are needed, is there a need to transfer information between them? Are the packages compatible with one another? Is there appropriate software that some of your financial team are already using at home or at work?

Step 3 – After choosing the software, determine the hardware (equipment) needs to run the software. Be sure to plan sufficient space for future growth.

Because churches vary in size, style, and ministries, the National Office does not endorse any one program as the “official” software. The listed software packages have been selected because they meet criteria we feel are important for use in most Alliance churches. These criteria include:

- The software operates on standard hardware.
- The accounting structure used by the program is: a) similar to church-style bookkeeping [cash basis], and b) according to generally accepted accounting procedures.
- The program is composed of independent “modules.” This means you can use as many or as few of the software features as you choose.
- It is integrated with a database program for membership records. Having to learn different programs for accounting, membership, mailing lists and attendance is usually impractical in the church setting. The listed programs all have these tasks integrated into the program and available as separate modules.

- It is expandable. As the church grows, the accounting needs will grow and change. The program should allow for significant growth. Do not get locked into a program that fits now, but not later. A program should be able to “export” information to your word processor and a common spreadsheet program.
- The program is menu-driven. This means the person using the program is prompted to make choices throughout the program. Most church treasurers are volunteers, rather than full-time employees of the church. The software must be easily and quickly learned. It should not require a great deal of memorization, since some of the financial team may use it only monthly or quarterly.
- Support and help are available. Most churches do not have a full-time computer expert on hand. The program should provide assistance in starting and running itself, through both written manuals and on-screen help. In addition, it should have a telephone number (preferably toll-free) where you can get assistance for more specific problems.
- The program has “password” or other security features. Membership files and financial giving records are very confidential. Only approved church officers should have access to those records. For example, the assistant treasurer or person recording individual contributions usually does not need access to the check-writing part of the program. Many programs allow only authorized users to enter certain parts of the program.

The following programs are some that are used by Alliance churches. They represent the lower and medium cost ranges available.

Membership Plus Deluxe

www.discountbible.com or www.discountchristian.com

Membership Plus Deluxe is an accounting and recordkeeping package designed for churches, clubs, and civic groups. It is especially adept at tracking membership, attendance and giving of church adherents who are involved in multiple group activities within the church (Sunday school classes, C&MA Men’s Ministry, etc.) It features pop-up windows for help in completing forms and printing reports. This deluxe version is a combination of two modules: Membership Plus (a database) and Money Counts (an accounting package).

Power Church Plus

PowerChurch Software
 328 Ridgefield Court
 Asheville, NC 28806
 (800) 486-1800 Toll-Free
www.pchurch.com

This package includes 14 modules: Mailing List, Member Profiles, Contributions and Pledges, Activities and Skills, Attendance, Fund Accounting, Accounts Payable, Payroll, Multi-user Support, Equipment Inventory, Music Library, Education Library, Sermon Filer, and Visitations. Features include the ability to add a new family or member to all the databases at once, a database expandable to over 100,000 families, a 60-day no-risk guarantee, free telephone support, zip code sequence printing for mailing lists (to get the post office discount), automatic

production of member directory, categorization of members skills by level of expertise and interest, and a system of filing and searching sermons.

(free demo disk)

Shepherd's Staff

Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson
St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
(800) 325-2399
www.shepherdsstaff.org

Shepherd's Staff software includes a Finance module capable of tracking an unlimited number of funds, accounts and vendors. Checks, deposits, and journal entries process automatically and analyzing budgets becomes easy.

Choose reports from a standard list or customize. Modules also available for Membership, Attendance and Contribution.

Church Management Systems (demo downloadable)

The Software Library
3300 Bass Lake Road, Suite 304
Brooklyn Center, MN 55429-3066
(800) 247-8044
www.SoftwareLib.com