



Tool

CHURCH ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

When it comes to tracking member worship attendance there are a lot of options.

Ultimately, one could simply use a ledger—either on paper or in Microsoft Excel. The ledger would list the names of every church member in alphabetical order in a column. Then the rows would list the dates of worship services. If this ledger is kept on paper, someone will actually have to count absences, which might be tedious. With Microsoft Excel, you could have the spreadsheet sort for rows that had no values entered for the more most recent dates.

However, if you want to make the task of tracking member attendance easier, you will want to look at church management software designed to do just that.

Cloud based or not?

One of the biggest questions you will need to wrestle with is whether or not you want your church management system to reside on a computer at your church or to reside in “the cloud.”

The difference between the two is simple. If the church management system resides in the cloud, then you can access that system and all the data from any computer, anywhere around the world. If you install church management system software onto a computer, you typically can only access it from that computer.

So which is better? It depends on what you want to do with the church management software. There are some church management software programs that can do everything: track attendance, record offerings, record prospect visits, schedule meetings, etc. If you want software that does all that, you will want it to be cloud based so that anyone can work in your church management system from any computer.

However, perhaps the *only* thing you want to do is track church attendance. That probably means one person will be entering the information from pew worship registers or Connection Cards into one computer. Normal software would work just fine.

This is not just an important decision for convenience, but also for your budget. Typically, cloud based church management systems charge the congregation a monthly fee. You are *always* paying for that system. If you use all the features of the system, that might be well worth it. However, if you are only tracking church attendance, it probably is not cost effective. With software you install on your computer, you purchase it and are done. (Often there is an option to pay monthly or annually for “technical support.”)

Open source software

“Open source” software is any software that may be freely used, shared, and modified. Open source software may be cloud based, or it may be software you download and install on one computer. Oftentimes with open source software, it is free to try some basic functions of the software. However, if you want to use more features or enter large data sets, then there is a fee.

This link takes you to a list of seven open source church management programs. They are all free to try. Almost all of them will then require you to pay a fee if you need to enter a larger amount of data. (For example, the software might allow you to enter fifty member names for free. If your church has more than fifty people, you will need to pay to unlock more storage.) However, the fees are all reasonable.

<http://blog.capterra.com/top-7-free-open-source-church-management-software-solutions/>

Some tested programs

There are some programs that have proven helpful to congregations.

Church 360 & Shepherd’s Staff

Both of these church managements have been produced by Concordia Publishing House. Church 360 is their cloud based version. Shepherd’s Staff software is PC-based. (Shepherd’s Staff is used in many WELS congregations.) Both programs boast a robust list of features.

With both Church 360 and Shepherd’s Staff, Concordia Technology Solutions has offered the WELS some very good discounts. A PDF file explaining both systems is included in this module.

www.bythebook.com

By the Book is a company that is cutting edge when it comes to tracking various church statistics. It even allows you the option to have people “check in” to worship or meetings using their smart phone. However, it is very flexible. They offer “Roll Call Lite” which makes recording attendance and offerings very easy. Their website contains many videos demonstrating what the software can all do. Take a look. *By the Book* also offers excellent training videos.

If you have more questions

Please feel free to contact WELS Center for Mission and Ministry (888-256-9357) and ask to speak to the Technology Office. Someone will be happy to give you guidance.