



Assimilation:

Best Practices with
the Whole Church in Mind

SOLUTION GUIDE

The ministry ideas, how to's, tips, and advice you need to develop an assimilation plan, PLUS... how our software, Realm®, can help you achieve this ministry goal.

Our Goal Is To Help You Have Real Ministry Impact



With nearly four decades of experience in providing services and software to churches of all sizes throughout the world, ACS Technologies has learned a lot. We've collected data, gained vital information, and received thousands of first hand testimonials on best practices and methods that effectively help ministries the most.

This knowledge is the basis for our free ministry guides like the one you're reading right now. We also offer a whole lot of other services, making us the world's largest provider of ministry solutions to churches.

We know everyone needs a little help sometimes. That's why we are providing advice, examples, tips, and information to help you turn your ideas into real ministry impact — that's what we mean when we say "Ideas to Impact."

It is our aim to assist in strengthening how you're currently doing church in providing an alternative to your current efforts. Whichever the case may be, it's our goal to be a trusted resource for how you're serving God.

There are a bunch of ways we can help, and the visual aid on this page outlines ways we can connect with you and help strengthen your ministry.

Thank you for downloading this ministry guide. It is our hope that the knowledge included can help empower you and grow your ministry the right way.

If you're interested in learning more or taking the next step for your ministry, you'll find our contact information at end of this guide.

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For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 18:20



Church:

A body of believers in Christ



Assimilation

- *assimilated, assimilating*

1. Taking into the mind and thoroughly comprehend
2. Absorbing into the culture or mores of a group
3. Giving people the best opportunity to get connected

For believers in Christ, the Church is not a building, it is people. Whether they've been members for 30 years or if this week was their first time attending, each individual (and his or her overall spiritual health) is important.

This means the chief goal of any ministry should be to ensure the church is proactive in assimilating people into a healthy and interconnected group to make disciples.

But, sometimes getting people connected, and helping them stay that way, is the most challenging aspect of ministry. So, how can churches get people connected and help them stay that way?

Let's discuss the three areas of involvement:



Fellowship

Building community
and celebrating
the Gospel



Discipleship

Developing a closer
spiritual relationship
with Christ



Service

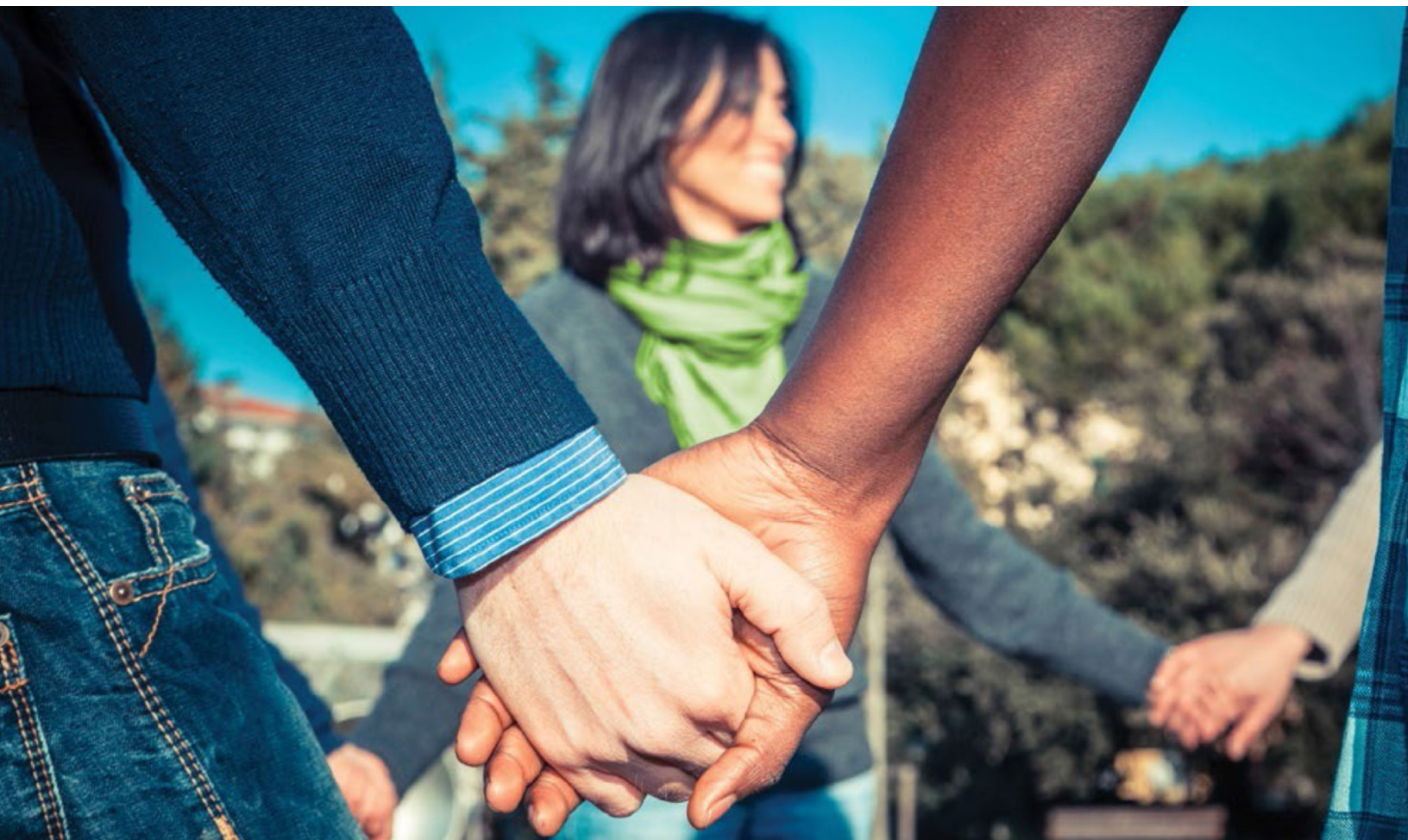
Taking on responsibilities
within the Church to help
it expand and grow

How do you create opportunities for fellowship? You can do this through events, small groups and affinity groups. How do you create opportunities for discipleship? You can do this through small groups and generous giving. How do you create opportunities for service? You can do this by making it easy for people to volunteer, by making sure you are not asking the same people over and over to pitch in, by identifying newcomers and intentionally leading them down a path of gift discovery and encouraging them to serve in their giftedness. Realm is an integrated, web based solution that can help your church achieve success in getting people connected and establish meaningful relationships with others.

But how do you get there?

There are numerous ways to get people plugged into your ministry via traditional means, whether it be a welcome center, greeters at each service, connect cards, etc. These methods are absolutely necessary. However, there is an important next step you should take in today's fast-paced world.

That step is to forge a connection outside the walls of the church building and bring that connectedness to people anytime, anywhere, through the use of technology. But, this kind of interaction doesn't happen without a deliberate plan to assimilate people into your ministry.



Things to keep in mind as you engage people at different levels of involvement.

The truth is, everyone in your congregation comes from different places. Some are brand new and looking to get plugged in to church activities quickly. Others may be new, but are taking things a bit more slowly, evaluating where they stand before jumping in to becoming more involved. And still others may have been there for years without becoming involved at all.

To get people connected, remember the three areas of involvement:
fellowship; discipleship; and service.

The key to getting people connected to your ministry is to help them find the place in which they best fit. When this happens, the entire church body can stand together and move deeper into service.

Here are three things your ministry needs to consider before you dive into making connections in your community.

Don't be pushy with visitors, but give them a place to get answers:

New people may be non-Christians who are being nudged by the Holy Spirit to see what church is about. They may be new to the area and shopping around for a church. Perhaps they've left a neighboring church that's going through a relationship split or other difficult situation. Either way, tread lightly, staying mindful to avoid the hard sell on your church. Remember, no one likes the hard sell. Utilize a welcome or information center with well trained volunteers to help answer questions about small groups, Bible studies, events and serving opportunities. Help them discover more about your church and invite them to try out an area in which they feel comfortable. Make sure that once they do, you have a reliable follow-up process in place.

Create a sense of excitement among new members:

During their "honeymoon" period with the church, it's important to get people plugged in so they can become active, engaged members. When they're plugged in, they can actively contribute to the church's overall health. Realm Pathways is a unique process that helps you and the newcomer find that place of connectedness. Most churches create a newcomer pathway with coaches who help answers questions and guide people to find a group that fits, or an area of service that is fulfilling. True "stickiness" occurs while living life together, and Realm Pathways helps your leaders guide people to a place that fits. Once that occurs, having an avenue to connect with church members online will be extremely helpful. Meaningful conversations occur outside of Sunday. Ministry happens and people want to be involved. Realm allows groups of all types to share news, prayers, and needs to be met with others. Lives are impacted organically.

Help lurkers and inactive members realize they're missing out:

When it comes to trying to engage with non-engaged people who've been around for months or years, the temptation is often to resort to using guilt. However, this is seldom effective. True spiritual growth and contribution to the church body as a whole is the byproduct of a close, daily relationship with Jesus. So, instead of guilt, call attention to the activities and life-changing events happening in the lives of active members. Every church holds events. Make sure that lurkers and inactive members have access to information about those events. If registration is necessary, make it easy. Post links to Realm events on your website, share them through social media channels, and print the QR code on the worship bulletin. Make it easy for people to get involved and they will.



These three points have a common thread. Using online tools can help you better connect to those within your ministry.

Fellowship:

Building community and celebrating the Gospel



There are a multitude of ways you can create opportunities for fellowship. And scripture supports that it's healthy in the life of every Christ-follower:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and more as you see the Day approaching.
(Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV)

The Bible clearly supports that fellowship and meeting together is key to keeping people involved and in relationship with others in the church. And, when they are involved and in relationship, they are more likely to be actively involved in the life of the church. You can build fellowship through events, small groups and serving together. Realm helps you move people from involvement in any area through Pathways into a small group or service group. You'll be able to keep track of every step that an individual takes toward getting connected. Coaches can encourage people and answer questions to eliminate barriers that keep them from getting involved. And you'll have history of how successful you've been, so you can make adjustments if necessary, or just keep on your current path.

You need tools that help people connect to a vibrant, active small group with other individuals that they can identify with. That means being able to know something about our groups, like what age group they are, where they meet and what they like to study together. Realm's group search helps people find their place of community. Individuals can search by day of meeting, read details about the group and see the location of where they meet. If interested, they can reach out to the group leader with just the push of a button. Realm makes it easy for people to connect with a group that works for them.

You also need to have fun together. Jesus hung out at parties, like weddings, festivals and celebrations. Christians need to demonstrate to the world that we can have fun too. Churches are continually hosting events to help people get connected to the life of the fellowship. So, it's important for them to promote the events well (through the church website, newsletters and at the visitor welcome center). Realm's integrated event registration helps people easily get connected to events happening at your church. They can read details, bring guests, provide custom information, and even pay online if there is a cost to the event.

You'll also want to make sure that as new events are planned, you are informing and inviting people who've attended similar events in the past, or people you have identified who may be interested in the future.

Maintaining those lists in a software solution that can serve the whole church helps you quickly find those individuals, and contact them through the preferred method they have indicated, whether by phone or email. Don't just rely on your website and hope that people will find the events you are promoting, be proactive and get the information out to the demographic or lifestyle of the people you know will want to attend.

Take the same approach with new small group launches. As your new season for groups approaches, find those individuals who aren't involved in a small group and reach out to them. Let them know that new groups are starting, where they are, and give them a little information about each group. Once they engage, make sure you have someone or a team of people reaching out to help them feel comfortable in attending that first group meeting.



Discipleship:

Developing a closer spiritual relationship with Christ



Most people engage with your church for the first time in worship. We are called to worship God, and the worship experience is an important part of church life. However, discipleship (the deepening relationship of an individual with Christ) is fostered better in the small group environment. Keep in mind the model set before us in Christ. Jesus taught and ministered to the crowds, but he was in extremely close relationship with 12 individuals. There's a valuable lesson there. If we want to deepen our relationship in Christ, we need to find a small group to belong to and share life with on a weekly basis. That means, as a church staff, you need to help people first find a group that fits. For a lot of individuals, that will mean speaking one on one with a trained volunteer or leader who can help answer the questions and is familiar with open groups in the church. Realm has tools that help someone looking for a group quickly and easily find a potential fit. In addition, serve up to those leaders important details such as:

- ✓ How many people does the group have now and how many will they be willing to accept?
- ✓ Where, when and what time do they meet?
- ✓ Who is the leader?
- ✓ Who is already in the group?
- ✓ What do they study (topic, scripture verses, life issues, etc)?

Putting this in the hands of your leaders helps effectively guide a visitor or new attendee to a group where they are more likely to feel comfortable and build lasting relationships. And if they are comfortable in the group, they are more likely to open up about things they are struggling with such as giving, prayer life, anger management, family struggles and studying the Bible. People in the group can come alongside them, encouraging them and sharing with them struggles they've had and overcome in the past. It all starts with helping people find the group that fits.

Once they are in the group, you can provide an environment for ongoing discipleship outside of the group meeting time. Every group in Realm has their own news feed in that allows individuals to within the group to post questions, share life circumstances, safely respond and learn how to incorporate Christian teaching and values in their daily walk. Prayers can be shared. Needs can be posted and met. And all of this happens in the security of the group itself.

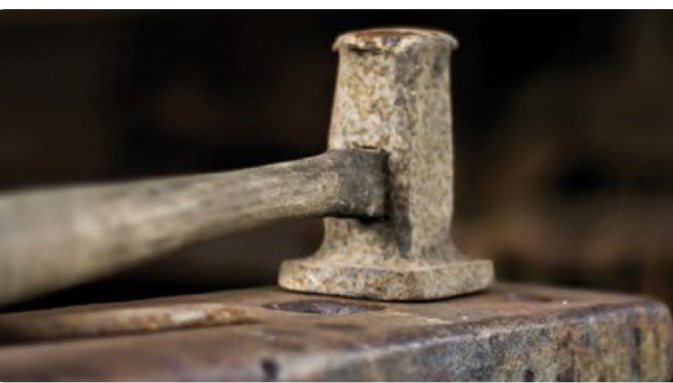
And let's remember that groups hold events. Pot luck suppers, community clean-ups, and local missions. That requires a tool to help organize the event (who's coming and what are they bringing?) People can RSVP so that group leaders are informed and prepared. All of this is built into Realm groups so that leaders can create events specifically for the group itself without involving the staff.

Service:

Taking on responsibilities within the Church to help it expand in growth and ministry



Saved people serve people. Once you've entered into a relationship with Christ, there's not another option. You are compelled to help forward the gospel in the community. Serving on a ministry team not only helps the church fulfill its mission, but it also builds relationships with others. Relationships forged in the act of serving are some of the strongest bonds that keep people involved in the life of the fellowship.



***As iron sharpens iron,
so one person sharpens another.***
(Proverbs 27:17)

We all know individuals who have become disenchanted with their church, but they won't leave because of relationships they've built through serving ministries. There's something about being on the mission field in a foreign country, serving breakfast for the homeless, working in a food pantry or assisting in a prison ministry with others that forges strong relationships and keeps people in viable service in the church.

You'll need ways to help people find serving opportunities and it needs to be easy for them to raise a hand to say 'I'm willing to help.' Tools that provide ways for individuals to find areas to serve, when and where those serving ministries operate and details about the serving ministry are extremely important. You can provide this on your website. It's also helpful for seeing where people are actively involved now and if you see that they are already serving in multiple areas, you can help them avoid serving burn-out before they over commit to too many serving teams.

An integrated system helps you monitor all of the above, especially if it is one that allows users to update their own profiles. You can easily check profiles to see what events they've attended, what groups or small groups they are currently plugged into (as well as the one's they've attended in the past), where they are currently serving or have served in the past and what skills they have. All of this helps you as a staff guide people appropriately, keeping them plugged in while protecting them from burning out.

Know thy demographic.

It's about the right person and fit, not just filling spots.

This is especially true in today's world, where hyper-connectedness leaves many people feeling more isolated than ever.

People everywhere, whether followers of Christ or not, are frazzled. They're over-worked and over-committed. A direct result of this can be that everyone's spiritual life suffers.



Believers have a strong desire to go deeper and to grow in their faith while sharing life in their church community. Meanwhile, those who don't yet know Jesus share the same need to belong. Salvation is often the result of a nagging sense of loneliness and a desire to find a new way of life.

What's interesting is these things are happening in an era of unprecedented connectivity, thanks to the growth of social media, smart phones, text messaging, and the Internet.

As society moves forward, most people are embracing technology as a means of reaching out to others. But what churches need are viable tools that can deliver real spiritual sustenance and a way of regularly connecting outside of normal church gatherings. It means having a place where someone can go to find groups that are available. It means having group leaders respond right away when someone shows interest in their group. It means making sure that your groups have a welcoming environment, are non-judgmental, are ministry oriented, and easy for people to enter. It means recovery groups for people dealing with grief or a particular sin in their life. It may also mean making sure you are starting new groups on a regular basis and informing the congregation when new groups become available. It's about technology that serves getting people started in building relationships.

Realm can help you do it all.



Realm is a whole-church, web-based software designed for ministry growth, community building and helping foster meaningful relationships. Even better, Realm fosters community building to happen at any time, from anywhere and from any device.

Imagine it's a Thursday night. Something happens and you're in need of prayer. You can simply use the Realm Connect App on your smartphone (or website, or email), choose the group in which you want to communicate, and send a prayer request. In turn, those praying for you can acknowledge your request and respond back, lending support for you in whatever situation you may be facing. The communication is private to the group, and the content is controlled by the church, not a business looking for marketing opportunities.

It is really that simple.

Realm provides churches the ability to develop rich communication and engagement between members, allowing you to maximize your ministry outreach opportunities and growth potential. In essence, it makes them more "sticky."

And according to Larry Osborne, senior pastor of North Coast Church in Vista, California and author of *Sticky Church*, churches who are "sticky" have a great advantage in member retention:



"Sticky churches have still another advantage. Since they fill the front door primarily with people who've come through word-of-mouth referrals, assimilation takes place naturally. Friends don't have to be reminded to assimilate friends. They do so naturally — and enthusiastically," Osborne says. "It's also easier to assimilate when there's no need to build a bridge between the bells and whistles of a big event and the more pedestrian programming of a weekend service. Even if there is an occasional measure of the bait and switch, those who come by the word-of-mouth invitation of a friend will know what to expect. There'll be no surprises. Instead of complex assimilation programs, a sticky church simply needs to provide plenty of ministry on-ramps to which members can easily connect the friends they've invited."



Connecting the office and the congregation for proper Assimilation carry-through.

After getting people connected, it's imperative that church volunteers and staff are able to help track their growth and help shepherd them in their spiritual journey.

Really, what use is there in having people connected if you're not able to effectively utilize a church management software tool to ensure a healthy ministry?

Without useful tools and software that help with productivity, it's harder for staff to do their jobs in an effective manner. When this happens, it hurts the ability for your ministry to make sure people are being properly assimilated and also that all of your office duties are current and correct.

There are several options when it comes to remote access for all of your software over the Internet. This means anyone on your staff with the appropriate permissions can access their work files whenever and wherever they need to. Being in the office is no longer required to complete your tasks, enter your data or connect with your members and staff. You can do it from your smartphone or tablet with a web-based software.

The optimal software would have to include several things to support your specific ministry goals and also be able to operate seamlessly with what's happening on the congregation front. In our more than 35 years of serving churches of all sizes, we've found several key needs all church staff (and congregants) have come to require, want and expect when it comes to tools to serve their needs.

On the following pages we'll break them down into categories to better assist you when you're researching what to do next.



Data management and customization.

The ability to use customized fields, lists and dates on personal profile records with report capability is key for church staff. This allows staffers to record and report on additional information that doesn't appear on a personal online profile (nor would a church member offer it up). Think partitioned data that is for staff eyes only. And, ideally, data management can be helpful to categorizing people who exhibit patterns of moving forward in spiritual growth.



Keep and use multiple contact information fields.

Many churches strongly desire the ability to store and use address contact information. Some software only have a few fields, but there are solutions that meet the need to have all of the contact information for an individual at the disposal of the church staff at all times.



Safeguard features.

Whether it's congregation-facing privacy or online payment/giving security, or tracking permissions and qualifications, it's important to have a software solution that does all of these things, safely and securely. Church staff also have/need options for customizing profile fields and flagging items specific to that person. This is important for the whole church also, as some software can track and report on allergies and medical conditions, which is imperative for communicating prayer requests and pastor visits.



Track attendance and other relationships.

Church staff have a strong interest in having the ability to mark attendance, report on attendance trends, and search on attendance patterns for all group types. They also love the ability to drive actions on attendance drop-out patterns, like entering them in a pathway for follow up, or email them to let them know they've been missed. It's been found that church staff love this option. While there's more and more discussion in public forums about the value or non-value of attendance tracking in regards to assimilation, there is no doubt it is useful in member retention (or intervening).



Financial safety and tracking.

Many church staff (and congregants) want their church to use a system that has complete integration of donations. For congregants, it's really because it makes things easier, including pledge management for their funds throughout the year. Ways to give and ensuring their money is safe may be a key issue for a new church attendee. For staff, it's because they want something that keeps a complete audit trail, has the ability to integrate online donations with manually entered donations and has the ability to report, search and analyze giving patterns, no matter how the gift is received. Additionally, churches want full featured online giving including mobile and text giving. All of this needs to integrate seamlessly with the giving and financial software. Realm does all of this.



Full, integrated event management.

Church staff want the ability to have full, customized check in kiosks for self-check in and assisted check in, for adults, students and children. They also want it for volunteers. AND we've found it doesn't hurt to have a module that has attendance automatically posted for all check-in events. Having the ability to search any data and send blast communication is also imperative to many.

And, yes, a kiosk can help people get assimilated, as long as it's an entry point for a well-designed follow-up process that involves staff and leaders reaching out to answer questions and get people comfortable with taking their next steps. For events, it's all about opening the doors for outsiders to see that the church consists of people just like themselves.



Again, these are the key findings for church needs when it comes to tools that help with assimilation. But most importantly, it gives you a snapshot of the possibilities that await your church when you utilize a whole-church solution to take the leap toward bringing new people into your congregation.

The biggest thing to remember though are the three areas of involvement:

- ✓ **Fellowship**, by connecting people with events, helping people find groups in which to belong, connecting parents of students and kids, etc.
- ✓ **Discipleship**, by giving opportunities for people to grow and flourish in their spiritual journey.
- ✓ **Service**, by helping people understand their giftedness when they do we need to make sure they are welcomed, trained and encouraged to serve.

Assimilation begins when you start taking steps to make it happen. With a strategic approach and the proper tools, including software that is a true whole-church solution, you can move forward with properly assimilating people the right away.

Real ideas for real ministry impact.

This guide is brought to you courtesy of ACS Technologies. We're excited to share more information with you about our new ministry tool, Realm.

Realm offers something for everyone in your church. It is a totally new type of church ministry software that combines administration, accounting, and community into one system. It also connects your entire church and personalizes each person's involvement in your ministry.

People in your church and on staff will love Realm. They can access it online or from their phones whenever they want. It's quick, user-friendly, and simple to get started. Plus, we've got a dedicated team to make it a smooth transition and guide you the rest of the way.



Administration

- Track what impacts your ministry
- Modernize church giving
- Host organized events
- Know who's coming and going
- Generate insightful reports



Accounting

- Organize your finances
- Maintain vendor relationships
- Pay bills and write checks
- Reconcile your accounts
- Plan and monitor budgets



Community

- Put names to faces
- Connect people in smaller groups
- Facilitate communication
- Shepherd people through life
- Grow your outreach potential

Three easy ways to learn how Realm can help your church:

- 1 Attend: You're invited to attend a live Realm demo. Just pick the day and time that's best for you
realmchurch.com/demo
- 2 Watch: Take a quick look into Realm. Visit realmchurch.com
- 3 Talk: Ask us anything. We're here to help.
Call 1(800)736-7425 or email solutions@acstechnologies.com

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Nearly 50,000
churches served



Over 400 staff
ready to serve



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