The Hidden Costs
of Your Church's

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Pastor Mike Adams had a dilemma. As the executive pastor of Grace Church, handling the church's yearly budget was a big part of his job. The church was growing. New people were joining the congregation regularly. The church's ministries were busier than ever, serving the congregation and the broader community. And giving was growing consistently alongside everything else.

However, one particular line item on the budget caused Pastor Mike extra concern year after year. The IT budget kept growing—and much faster than annual giving.

Ever since 2020, Pastor Mike realized that the church's digital infrastructure was critical to its future growth. He didn't doubt the need to continue to make an investment in IT, but he knew the church couldn't sustain the surprise costs they never seemed to account for in the budget.

Pastor Mike didn't want to cut back on the church's commitment to technology. He knew the church needed to be able to leverage technology to engage the congregation and the community. But he needed to get a handle on what the church was spending on its digital infrastructure. He couldn't afford to draw out of the church's savings another year to bail them out when a surprise came.

Pastor Mike's dilemma - get a handle on surprising IT costs or cut back on another area of ministry - isn't unique to Grace Church. While Pastor Mike's story is fictional, it points to genuine issues. Congregations all across North America have faced a similar problem in the years following 2020.

But there's good news. Your church can stabilize IT costs so you once again have a predictable church tech budget. This guide not only points out the seven costs likely wrecking your IT budget, but it provides you with a solution that helps you upgrade your IT environment inside a budget you can count on.

7 Hidden Costs of Church IT

Your church likely has a line item in its budget for IT costs.

When you see it, maybe you think of the initial cost of hardware in your church—the new computers for your workstations. You probably think of your Internet and web hosting costs.

But here's what you don't realize about your IT budget. It's an iceberg. Many of the most significant costs—the ones that'll make or break your budget—are below the surface.

Here are a few examples.

Staff

You probably think of all the budgetary costs you could underestimate, staff expenses aren't one of them. You're accustomed to budgeting for staff. You get that you need to budget for insurance and other benefits.

But some tech staff costs still inevitably surprise us. Some of those surprising costs can be:

- Specialized skill requirements: As technology becomes more complex, churches are finding it important to get increasingly specific about their skill needs. 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 constants. 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 have to train new staff (or send them elsewhere for training at a cost). Maybe most importantly, 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 available for training, the need is absolutely critical for your tech team. You can't afford for your IT team to miss an important security update or to be unaware of a new piece of software.

Plus, the need for IT training never goes away. Technology is regularly updated (or at least it should be!). 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

Just because you're a church doesn't mean you don't need to stay compliant with state and federal laws, particularly those related to data security. These regulations aren't static either. As tech becomes an increasingly bigger part of our lives, regulations to provide a safe environment change. Maybe the most difficult part of compliance is simply getting a handle on tech regulations related to churches. You likely won't know what's already on the books.

Data Backup

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

Data Security

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

If that data gets in the wrong hands, your church will put people at risk and ruin your public witness. Plus, more and more legal entities are making organizations accountable for how they handle the data of others. While many of these laws include non-profit exemptions, not all of them do, and it's entirely possible that more states will include non-profits in these legislations in the future.

Hardware Maintenance and Updates

As mentioned earlier, churches can't expect a static tech environment. The computers you invest in today—even if they are top of the line—shouldn't be expected to last beyond four years. Even if you cycle through hardware at 25 percent a year, you'll need to make a sizable investment each year to make sure you're up to date.

Even hardware you're not replacing needs regular maintenance to keep them running optimally. Those costs add up.

Tech failure

Sometimes technology fails. Computers crash. Important data disappears. Airtight security is breached.

Of course, there's a cost when any of that happens. Some of those costs are obvious. When your website goes offline, you might miss donations. But think of the lost productivity that happens when your IT hardware goes down. Consider what tech failure does to your ability to meet needs inside and outside of your community.

Downtime also affects staff productivity. You likely already have a lean staff. Frequent network outages and hardware problems means the staff you have can't do their jobs as effectively as needed.

Why Choose Managed Church Tech

Your church isn't a business. You have bigger concerns than whether your budget balances or what your ROI looks like this quarter. Eternities hang in the balance of what you do.

But your budget does matter. Your ability to serve your community selflessly requires resources. Like many churches, you likely have more ministry you'd like to do than the resources necessary to get the work done.

That's where managed IT solutions can help. They can help you take the guesswork out of your IT budget so you can focus on what you do best—serving your community.

What is a managed tech solution?

A managed tech solution is a company you partner with to provide part or all of your IT needs. You pay a set price monthly and they provide the services you need. 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 (at least to some extent).

Here are seven reasons for your church to consider partnering with 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 church 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 people who understand these security needs in charge of your technology. As long as you pick the right one, they'll deploy the latest defenses to keep those bad actors away from your important information.

Get a consistent budget item

A managed tech solution transforms one of the most unpredictable expenses in your budget to one of the most consistent. Because you know what to expect from technology, you can deploy your resources more strategically on core ministry opportunities.

With a managed tech solution, you pay one price every month for a specified list of services, no matter what goes wrong. When tech crashes, you get to bypass the extra replacement costs.

Gain access to expertise

With a constantly changing tech environment, you need world-class IT support. But getting top-notch IT talent isn't always possible with a church budget. A managed tech solution provides you with the ability to engage people with deep experience in the tech tools you use—and the ones you'll use in the future.

Plus, when you work with a managed tech solution that specializes in churches and religious non-profits, you have access to people who not only understand the technology you're using but your specific use cases.

Scale without hiring

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Provide a proactive approach to IT problems

Your church can either choose to be proactive or reactive when it comes to the tech issues you face. You can look ahead to the needs you'll have in the future or respond when problems arise. With technology always changing, it's important to be ready for whatever comes next.

With a managed tech solution, you have a team of local church technology experts looking out for your future needs. You have enough on your plate serving the needs of your community and your congregation. Technology is one stressor you no longer need to be concerned about.

Save time and money

Eliminate your need for an in-house IT team. In essence, you're sharing IT expertise with other churches so you're getting a high level of support with a minimal investment. Shared resources and pooled expertise cuts costs without losing service (and most likely, adding new services).

Improve dependability

Technology can be a powerful accelerant to the ministry you want to do in your community. But let's face it. When your tech crashes, it can set your work back.

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

How Higher Ground Can Help

Your church needs more than a managed tech solution for your church. You need a partner. Your church's IT needs are as unique as your ministry. While you'll find many qualified managed tech solutions in the marketplace, you'll find few that understand how churches like yours deploy technology in ministry.

Higher Ground has over 20 years of experience supporting the mission of churches with world-class technology services.

While you're focused on designing an effective weekly worship service, managing ministries, engaging volunteers, and developing strategies for the future, Higher Ground will handle your IT needs.

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

Subscription-based IT management

Higher Ground can replace or supplement your church's IT staff. For many services, you pay a simple monthly subscription 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 of on-site support.

World-class technology services

Every church has unique IT needs. Even churches with a similar size have different missions and different ways they employ IT to achieve that mission.

Whatever your church's IT needs, Higher Ground can help with services that include:

- Network server hardware and server virtualization
- Network infrastructure - switches, firewalls and routers
- Security evaluations and risk mitigation
- Computer workstations, laptops, check-in systems
- Enterprise wireless systems
- VoIP phone systems (via cloud or on premises)
- Email spam-filtering
- Backup solutions
- Software licensing

Partnering with Higher Ground for the services above gives your church the peace of mind to focus on your ministry without pesky IT concerns.

Consulting

Higher Ground can also walk with your church as you try to use technology strategically in your ministry context. Higher Ground Consulting can help your church:

- 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 church needs for the future.

Orange Community Church:
Big Technology Wins Through Managed Tech

Even before the church's only IT employee gave his two-week notice, Orange Community Church needed help with its tech needs. One person simply couldn't handle the IT responsibilities of a growing church and a K-12 Christian school. Despite a growing amount of the budget heading toward technology, breakdowns were occurring.

When the church's IT director took a new position elsewhere, the church had to make a serious change of direction. That's when retired tech consultant and key volunteer of a nearby congregation Curtis Ponzio recommended the church consider Higher Ground. Based on Curtis' recommendation, Orange Community Church began working with Higher Ground.

In the long run, Ponzio believes Higher Ground will save the church money, but that's not the biggest advantage of a managed tech solution.

"I would say probably the number one reason for using managed services is continuity of operations," Ponzio said. "People come and go in the church—and they come and go with their skill sets, everything that comes with a relationship with a person. Some things get so wrapped up with one person, whether it's time or the way the person runs the department, that when they leave, everything falls apart. So with a managed service, like Higher Ground, you have continuity no matter who's there, how many, or how few. The network, or the computer part of the operations, stays the same."

Ponzio says one of the reasons he believes in managed tech solutions like Higher Ground is the ability to get access to experts in a variety of fields, rather than depending on a single generalist.

"It's very hard to be up to date and up to speed on every section of the network, whether it's the servers or the switches, or the firewall, you can know a lot about all those areas. But with a managed service [like Higher Ground], you have people who are extremely knowledgeable about every area of the network instead of just one," Ponzio said.

Thanks to Higher Ground, Orange Community Church can now focus on its mission and not the changing dynamics of its IT needs.

The Power of a Consistent IT Budget

Your IT budget matters. It's not just about silicone and wires. It's about transformation—and about how God is working in your church in the digital age we're in. Churches today can leverage digital media to engage their communities through online services, connect their congregants in new and exciting ways, and share the good news far and wide.

But your IT budget isn't just about technology. It impacts every other part of your budget. When you can't control the budget for your digital infrastructure, your other ministries are impacted.

What if next year you could write your IT budget in pen (rather than pencil)? What if you knew IT surprises were a thing of the past?

Imagine the new ministries you could start. Consider the ministry risks you could take once your IT needs were out of your hair.

Watch our recorded webinar to learn more about how Higher Ground can help your church build a better, more consistent IT infrastructure. For more information on how to access it, click here.

Specialized IT expertise for churches, nonprofits, and businesses

Step into a new era of seamless technology with Higher Ground, a recent addition to the ACS Technologies family! With two decades of expertise dedicated to serving the technological demands of religious organizations, nonprofits, and businesses, Higher Ground is here to revolutionize your IT landscape.

Our passion lies in empowering ministry partners, nonprofits, and businesses by constructing robust and reliable technology environments. At Higher Ground, we go beyond the ordinary, delivering unparalleled support and services that transcend expectations.

Explore a comprehensive suite of services tailored to meet the unique needs of your ministry, business, or nonprofit. From cutting-edge managed services and insightful consulting to top-notch phone and wireless systems, backup solutions, security services, and beyond – we've got it all covered.

Higher Ground stands proudly as a Managed Service Provider (MSP), capable of either fulfilling your organization's entire IT requirements or expertly maintaining specific systems. Our management services encompass vigilant monitoring, proactive updates, robust data security, foolproof backup and disaster recovery, and dedicated support.

Ideal for organizations without an in-house IT staff or those seeking to alleviate the burden on their existing team, Higher Ground is your strategic ally in navigating the ever-evolving tech landscape. Elevate your digital experience with Higher Ground – where innovation meets unwavering commitment.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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