



Empowering Churches with Solutions to Simplify
Complex Diocesan and Parish Church Management

ParishSOFT Customer Success Story:

Diocese of Sioux Falls
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

ParishSOFT®

Background

The Diocese of Sioux Falls is spiritual home for over 120,000 baptized members in eastern South Dakota. As a diocese, they live a charism of service nowhere more vividly apparent than in the Office of Technology. Entertaining “any technology [or remotely tech-like] question” with warmth and aptitude, the 3-person team has built a legacy of trust, deeply integrated collaboration, and foundational parish-diocesan relationships.

The team serves a large geographic region, with areas of expertise ranging from networking and websites, to data management, database support and virus protection – to name a few. An ordinary day for Database Administrator, Carla Haiar, will likely reflect the range of tech expertise found in any given diocese. She may walk a parish through finding resources on the diocese’s website and turn around to pull family data from ParishSOFT Family Suite for an in-depth analysis in support of data-informed ministry. No task is too complex or mundane.

Partners with ParishSOFT for over 10 years, the diocese transitioned all its parishes from ParishSOFT Desktop to the web-based ParishSOFT Family Suite in 2014. Says Haiar, with ParishSOFT, “We’re not dealing with a lot of data integrity issues that others deal with because everyone is on the same platform.”

Supporting Parishes

A single integrated database is foundational to data integrity and effective maintenance. However, the level of parish collaboration and efficiency reached by the Diocese of Sioux Falls is optional. Haiar notes that when working to overcome hurdles to integrating technology into parish life, listening with empathy is essential, “It is amazing how often they [parishes] just want to be listened to.” Listening enables understanding – essential to building trust and reaching effective solutions – both necessary for long-term organizational change.

The common platform simplifies and enables greater breadth of parish support. When a parish calls with a question, the diocese is able to quickly determine if it likely to be an issue for multiple parishes – and just as swiftly sends a communication to clarify the issue for the whole diocese. A uniform system also lends itself to the development of data standards and best practices; corresponding resources then translate to better training for parish staff, especially in the case of high staff turnover.

Always available over the phone, or by email, the office also believes in proactive communication. Offering in-person, video and webinar training and walk-throughs of product updates – even paper documentation for those who prefer a printable step-by-step guide – the diocese intentionally communicates in a variety of channels to better serve parish staff. Information and trainings are vital, and so is frequently affirming parishes for their many successes on the journey of data-powered work and ministry.

Observed Haiar, “The biggest thing about ParishSOFT is the ability to bring it all into one big circle...it brings community together so that they know they’re not isolated.” The diocese also appreciates the role Family Suite has played in teaching parishes that their actions, such as data collection and maintenance, “affect, impact, and help” one another. Accurate, up-to-date records at one parish is a victory for the whole diocese when it comes to better ministering to parishioners.

Collaboration in Action, *The Bishops Bulletin*

The diocesan monthly magazine, *The Bishop's Bulletin*, provides an excellent case study for communal work in action. The magazine is destined for all registered, active families in the diocese. Using information obtained from the Family Suite, publications are sent from the diocese. Should any be returned as undeliverable, the diocese will mark the Family's Status in the software as "Post Office Returned" – enabling the parish to investigate and make changes to the family record if necessary.

This collaborative recordkeeping effort takes place entirely online within the ParishSOFT system, without the need for additional emails, phone calls, or communications. The process, Haiar says, "Helps us save time, money, and increase efficiency." Consistency and diligence pay off. The last mailing had zero duplicates and over 99.7% mailing accuracy! It's an accomplishment they naturally celebrated with their parishes.

Annual Appeal

The annual appeal can seem to loom large on the horizon for many dioceses and parishes. At the Diocese of Sioux Falls, this yearly initiative is met with their typical hands-on approach and uncompromising determination.

Every October, the diocese performs an information audit to identify family record inconsistencies or potential inaccuracies that could impact the appeal. For example, they have requested parishes not use the "Do not send mail" field available within a family record. A handy feature if used properly, it too soon can become a catchall for information more accurately identified elsewhere. Instead, parishes are encouraged to use fields such as Temporarily Relocated (i.e. "Snowbirds") or an explanatory family status, such as: "Requests not to receive mail", etc.

Reports of audit findings are then sent to parishes to review and make corrections as necessary. About 70% of parishes respond with the needed changes, a participation gap that could exist for a number of reasons, including lack of staff available to research the records. In those cases, the diocese is able to make changes, when necessary, directly through the Family Suite. It's a level of diocesan-to-parish support made both possible and simple with ParishSOFT's cloud-based software.

Digital communication is partnered with in-person availability that sends the clear message to parishes: "You are important!" Essential database maintenance covered, the technology team is ready to hit the road to provide hands-on support. "Ministry Tech Days" are day-long events held at different locations around the diocese. Workshops feature a variety of topics to help enrich parish life and ministry through technology, including: new technology tools, trainings, and annual appeal readiness. They're also an invaluable opportunity to spend time with parish staff, encouraging them in their ministry, and empowering them to take the lead in becoming stewardship parishes committed to inviting others in.

The spirit of service-in-action that characterizes the Office of Technology has tangible rewards. Their encounters with the office are one of the most positive experiences of the diocese that parishes mention on their annual appeal feedback. Diocesan staff are happy to see that the goodwill established between the office and their parishes gives rise to generosity that not only results in ongoing technology support, but spills into every other aspect of diocesan initiatives from education, onward.

Next Steps

Having a solid data infrastructure enables the diocese to see who is engaged and participating in parish life. This wealth of accurate and actionable data makes it possible for them to take parish support to a whole new level. Empowered with the information they need, data from the Family Suite can be plugged into other applications, allowing the diocese to provide a parish with an in-depth understanding of parishioner demographics, giving history, and important trends to better enact parish campaigns and special projects.

Their secure, cloud-based system provides the stability and flexibility needed for parish collaboration and supports effective communication for the whole diocese. Now, with so many parishes engaged and excited about leveraging technology for mission, the diocese looks forward to taking the next step to more seamlessly integrate technology in support of parish and diocesan mission.

ParishSOFT would like to acknowledge the Office of Technology for serving their parishes and the Diocese of Sioux Falls with passion and excellence. Their model of collaboration and communication with empathy truly sets a standard for strong and flourishing parish and diocesan relationships. Thank you for allowing us to serve you in your mission.

Additional Information

ParishSOFT has helped thousands of parishes and dioceses implement ConnectNow solutions. For an analysis of your software and services needs, please visit parishsoft.com or call us at 866-930-4774 x6.

CELABRATING 20 YEARS OF SERVICE



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