

Information Technology Management at a Religious Organization

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Abstract: Religious organizations face many of the same problems that business organizations face. The study describes information technology management issues facing a mid size religious organization, and the process it went through to organize its knowledge management efforts.

Keywords: Knowledge management, religious organizations, information systems.

I. Introduction

Religious organizations face many of the same problems that business organizations face. Administrators of religious organizations perform many functions business managers perform. Therefore, they face similar information technology management challenges faced by regular for profit businesses. This case study reports challenges facing a midsize religious diocese and its many parishes located in the United States and recommendations made by a team of external consultants.

II. Background

The diocese is located in a western state in the US. It comprises several counties and covers over 10,000 square miles. The total population in the diocese exceeds one million people. The number of members of the diocese is more than 200,000, almost twenty percent of the total population. There more than eighty priests assigned to various parishes in the diocese. In addition to a wide geographical coverage, the diocese is also ethnically diverse.

To facilitate management and administration, the diocese has adopted computer technology to help manage information. In the past decade, the diocese manages and supports an internal computer network with typical productivity tools to assist with the daily operations of the organization. The diocese has a website that provides a large amount of information to its members and the public. While the diocese is fulfilling its fundamental mission for the church, it has been challenged with growth and limited resources to

manage the information interdependency among its parishes, parishioners and its governing organizations.

III. Current Technology Status

Proper technology to facilitate better communication between the diocese and parishes is a high priority. Currently, a variety of communication methods are used. Most parishes rely on low-tech channels, such as postal service, telephones, and fax machines. Only a small portion use e-mail frequently.

Slightly more than 50 percent of parishes have their own Web pages. The majority of parishes own more than five computers. Two-third of the parishes has local area networks. A variety of software applications are used for various purposes.

IV. Initiative

The bishop of the diocese decided to employ an external consulting group to look into the technology infrastructure of the diocese and make recommendations to improve its information technology and information management. The consultants were brought in to meet with the top administrators and survey the parishes. The existing systems, users, and applications were analyzed.

V. Results

After detailed information gathering and analysis, the consultants made a series of recommendations:

1. Automation in parishes
2. Create a centralized file server at the diocese
3. User training
4. Establish a virtual private network between parishes and the diocese
5. Replace some existing applications with new ones that facilitate information exchange with other applications