

The Smart Guide to Buying Church Management Software



BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Capterra's free service matches you with the right church management software.



Save Time & Money

Don't spend weeks researching products that won't work for you.



Create a Shortlist

Our experts help you find 3 to 5 ChMS products that fit your requirements.



Find Your Match

We'll connect you with vendors to get price quotes and demos.

"Capterra helped me find the best church management software for my church. They sent me the names of several companies that fit the needs I gave them."



Linda White
Ridglea Christian Church

Ready to Buy Software for Your Church?

We'll recommend the best solutions.

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Introduction

A Beginner's Guide to Buying a ChMS ● ●



Church Management Software

noun, (acronym: ChMS)

Specialized software that assists churches and other religious organizations in structuring and automating daily operations. These products assist in the management of membership and mailings, fundraising, events, and report generation. Churches use this software to reduce the cost of operations and track the growth in their congregations.

Did you know 32% of new churches fail within four years? ¹

Why is this? What tools and resources do the ones that make it have that the failures don't? And most importantly, how can you make sure that your church is not in the 32%?

At Captterra we believe software makes the world a better place, and that it can give your church the tools it needs to not only survive, but thrive. That's why we've created this guide...to help you find the right church management software (ChMS). We know you want to spend more time with your ministry and less time with paperwork, so we've cut the fluff.



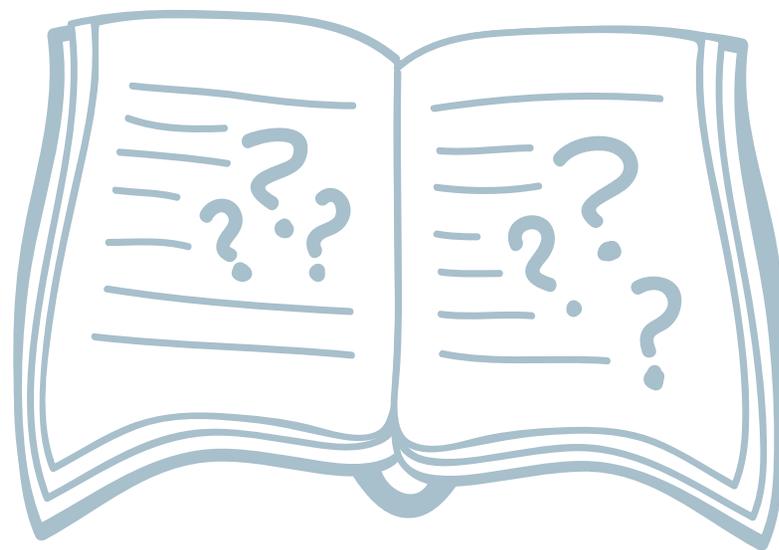
Introduction

A Beginner's Guide to Buying a ChMS ● ●

Whether you are a first-time buyer or are looking to switch systems, this software guide will answer your questions about church management software and ChMS solutions, such as:

- ❓ Why should you consider a church management software solution?
- 🕒 When do you need church management software?
- 🔍 How do you buy the right solution for your church?
- 💰 What should you expect to pay for a church management solution?
- ✍️ What are the basic and advanced features of a typical ChMS?

We'll give you tons of practical information so you have a solid understanding of how to select the right church management software solution for your church.



Chapter 1

Good and Bad Reasons to Buy a ChMS ● ● ● ● ●



There are a lot of great reasons to buy a ChMS....and a few bad ones. Do you have all of the necessary requirements? Answer “yes” or “no” to the following questions to find out if you’re ready...

QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1 Do you have 25-50 members and are growing?		
2 Do you have a dedicated person or people to “own” the system?		
3 Do you have established processes in place for attendance tracking, donations, etc.?		
4 Do you have staff members that are comfortable using computers or are willing to learn?		
5 Do you handle registrations for church events?		
6 Do you offer member self-service?		
7 Do you have a school or Sunday school?		
8 Do you run a large number of different types of reports and enter the same information in multiple records or applications?		
9 Do you have a large number of volunteers?		
10 Do you spend a lot of time on printing and postage to keep in touch?		

Tally up your “yes” answers to determine your readiness score.

TOTAL:

Chapter 1

Good and Bad Reasons to Buy a ChMS



DECODING YOUR SCORE



0-2

A ChMS may or may not be what you need right now. Let's review some of the basics before you move on.

3-5

You're most likely ready for a ChMS, but keep studying the material so you're 100% prepared.

6-10

You're totally ready! Skip ahead to [Chapter 2](#) and get started!

Score lower than you thought? Don't worry. You may still be ready for a ChMS:

- ➔ A lot of churches don't necessarily have registration for events, have a school, or have a large number of volunteers. But that doesn't mean that a small church doesn't need software! Even if you have a small number of volunteers and only have a few children at Sunday school, you may still be able to benefit from a ChMS.
- ➔ Also, even if you have a small number of members and don't plan or anticipate much growth any time soon, you could still benefit from a ChMS, as many churches that want to remain small still need an easier way to handle the members that they have.

If you find yourself saying things like "Who is in charge of X,Y, or Z process?" or, "No one here wants/knows how to use a computer!" ... you have other issues to address before purchasing a ChMS.

Chapter 1

Good and Bad Reasons to Buy a ChMS



HERE'S WHAT A CHMS **CAN** DO:

- ✓ **Keep track** of your contributions, memberships, and attendance.
- ✓ **Manage schedules** for events, classes, and worship services.
- ✓ **Handle your accounting needs** with not-for-profit accounting functionality, fund management, and the ability to track income and expenses.
- ✓ **Manage donations** and online giving.
- ✓ **Manage groups**, ministries, and volunteers.



HERE'S WHAT A CHMS **CAN'T** DO:

- ✗ **Completely grow your membership.** While a software system can help you save time and help you to better run your church and your processes in order to aid you in growing your membership, it won't do all the work for you, and simply buying software is not going to fix all your problems.
- ✗ **Eliminate your need for office/church administrators.** You will still need people there to use the software and keep on top of things—however, it will reduce the number of people you need in the office doing all of the tasks that one person may be able to take charge of using software. Also, it should enable your administrators to focus more on your ministry.

Chapter 1

Good and Bad Reasons to Buy a ChMS



RELATED SOFTWARE

Keep in mind that there are other stand-alone and other “church software” products that do not cover the functionality of true church management software: Take the time upfront to define the type of software you need.

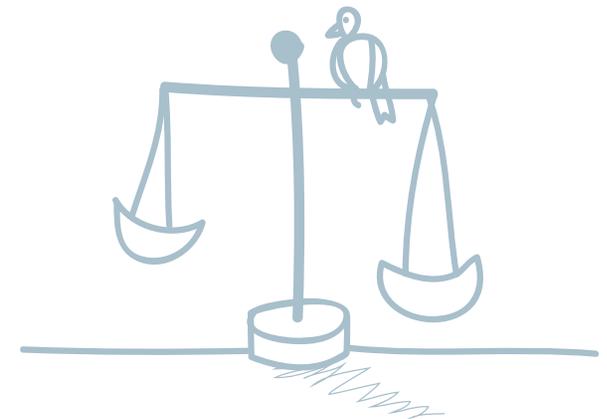
Examples of related “church” software products:

-  **(Non-profit) accounting software** does not include membership, scheduling, and administration functionality.
-  **Membership management software** does not include fund accounting, donation management, and administration functionality. It also does not use church-specific terminology.
-  **General “church software”** includes applications like worship software, donation software, and religious education software. They lack the core church management functionality.
-  **Other non-church specific software** may include some functionality like day care management, scheduling, facilities management, or contact management but are not specifically for churches.



Selection Tip

As you define the type of software you need, also decide if you want an integrated solution or if several stand-alone applications will work better for your church.



Chapter 1

Good and Bad Reasons to Buy a ChMS



Why do so many churches fail in the first four years?

If you are struggling to run your church and are worried about it failing, you are not alone. The reason that 32% of new churches fail within 4 years is because they lacked the tools, training, and resources to grow.

Churches that did survive were more likely to:

- ➔ Raise additional funds
- ➔ Have and be able to coordinate larger groups of founders and volunteers (26-50 as opposed to 25 or less for struggling churches)
- ➔ Have a proactive stewardship development plan.

10-30% *increased collections for churches who added online giving functionality through a ChMS. ²*

Your church doesn't have to be a statistic. **Church Management Software can increase the amount of money you raise**, help you coordinate dozens of volunteers and employees, and track financial and stewardship goals. The next chapter will tell you exactly what to look for in a ChMS so your church can survive, thrive, and prosper.

Chapter 2

ChMS Plan and End Goals ● ● ● ● ●



Now that you've taken the assessment test and know that you're ready to buy, it's time to dig deeper and truly identify your ChMS needs. With so many ChMS options and features available, clearly establish your requirements to ensure that the ChMS that you choose really does what you need.

☰ STEP 1: Define your requirements and figure out your overall strategy

First, to figure out which features you need in a ChMS, your church needs to define its management strategy.

By answering the following questions, you'll pave the way for a much more productive conversation with church management software companies.

- 1 What information do we need to record about our members? (contact information only, full family profiles?)
- 2 Do we want to track activities, attendance, and contributions on an individual level?
- 3 Do staff members do work at the church or remotely?
- 4 Do we have volunteers?
- 5 Are there a few primary people who are responsible for most of the administration and management or do numerous people have responsibility for many small areas?
- 6 How comfortable are we with the Internet and web-based applications?
- 7 Are we a Catholic church that needs to track sacraments of our members, or another denomination with similar specific requirements?

Chapter 2

ChMS Plan and End Goals



☰ STEP 2: Come up with use cases

Consider the culture of your church and develop examples of how and who will use your church management system, how you will track members, and what kind of information you want to track.

Use the answers to the questions in Step 1 to create all the possible combinations of users, methods of tracking, and follow-up methods, so that when you talk to a ChMS vendor you can paint a very clear picture of what you need their system to do for you.

***For example:** The First Baptist Church currently has 250 members, and they are hoping to grow to 400 or 500 in the next year. They have an office staff of 8-10 people, and right now they all do their different tasks manually and with Excel spreadsheets: accounting, membership tracking, event and service scheduling, and donor management. Most people come in and work in the office, but some people are often on the go and will need to access the system on their laptops or smartphones. They need to have all of the various user permissions and restrict access to certain departments. So only the accountant can access the financials, the office manager can access only his areas of work, and the event planner only sees the event side of things. The pastor needs to have complete access to the whole system, and the church needs lower level user permissions for volunteers.*

Chapter 2

ChMS Plan and End Goals



STEP 3: Identify your basic features

It's possible to find hundreds of "features" in a church management software solution, but you should focus on the top 10-15 that your church really needs. Here are some of the most common basic and advanced features of a ChMS:

BASIC FEATURES | *Common in most ChMS*

- ✓ Membership management and directory
- ✓ Family records, profiles, and groups
- ✓ Outreach and follow-up
- ✓ Attendance management and check-in
- ✓ Contributions management
- ✓ Non-profit accounting or integration with accounting packages
- ✓ Event management
- ✓ Resource and facilities management
- ✓ Scheduling and calendars

ADVANCED FEATURES | *Not included in all ChMS*

- ✓ Mobile apps and social media tools
- ✓ Online and virtual church services
- ✓ Multi-site management
- ✓ Volunteer management
- ✓ eGiving and/or eCommerce integration
- ✓ Members self-service
- ✓ Worship planning
- ✓ Candidate self-service
- ✓ Payroll management
- ✓ Integration with content management systems

Chapter 2

ChMS Plan and End Goals



TRENDING IN #CHMS

Cloud-based ChMS: Basically just a fancy way to say “online” or “web-based.” According to a [survey conducted by LifeWay Research](#), very few churches are thinking about “the cloud” as anything more than fluffy, white vapor hanging in the sky.

Child Check-In: A module that is typically fully integrated with your software and can also work great on your tablet or smartphone. Used for securing check-in for your school or daycare purposes in order to keep your children safe and organizing classrooms and class assignments.

eGiving: This is an automatic transfer program which allows a church member to make contributions without writing checks. A member’s weekly or monthly contributions can be charged to their credit card or transferred electronically from their bank account directly to the church account. This can be set up as a one-time donation or automatically on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

Content Management Integration: Content management solutions are computer programs that allow publishing, editing and modifying website content. They often have custom apps and mobile marketing, and churches often use it to integrate their church database with their church website. There are some great content management solutions out there for you to consider.

eCommerce Integration: Commercial transactions conducted electronically on the Internet.

Virtual Church Service: Church service broadcast online via ChMS software.

Only 12% of churches use web based church management software to share information about their members and ministries.

Chapter 2

ChMS Plan and End Goals



Another ChMS “feature” to seriously consider is its platform. Do you want a web-based or an on-premises solution? There are pros and cons to both, so ask the software companies detailed questions about security, backup/recovery, and data ownership.

Here are some pros to each kind:



Web-based: accessible anywhere with an internet connection, can be used on most computers/devices, maintenance and upgrades are handled by the vendor, lower initial investment, easier integration with other online systems, often more user friendly.



On-premises: greater ability to customize, greater access to data (there is more control), easier integration with other installed systems, greater flexibility with deployment, potentially lower lifetime investment.

The 5 Most Commonly Requested ChMS Features

- 1 Membership Management
- 2 Attendance Tracking
- 3 Donation Management
- 4 Calendar Management
- 5 Member Profiles



** Based off of Capterra ChMS buyers in 2013.*

Chapter 3

The Last Judgement



Now that you know what you're looking for, it's time to start shopping around. But be forewarned...you won't be able to necessarily just live by "ask and you shall receive" when it comes to finding the right ChMS, so if you want to get exactly what you want in a system, you've got some work to do. Your first task to prep for the ChMS search is to create a list of possible software solutions for your church.

1 Which of these options is smarter?

- A. Spend days researching ChMS solutions and enter your findings into a complicated spreadsheet
- B. Use an online tool that does all of this for you

2 Do you really need to demo every single ChMS?

- A. No. Demos are just sales pitches that don't tell you anything new.
- B. Yes. You wouldn't hire an employee without interviewing them.

3 Who should be involved in a ChMS demo?

- A. Your office administrators (secretary, accountant, etc.)
- B. Your volunteers
- C. The pastor

4 How much does a ChMS cost?

- A. \$1
- B. \$1 million

#1: If you don't want to lose hope, the answer is B.

#2: B. Demos allow you to go beyond the sales jargon and actually see what the software looks like and does.

#3: All of the above. Each of the groups will need to know different things, and it saves you the time of having to teach someone how to use the software later on if they need to.

#4: Neither. ChMS pricing can vary, but we'll break it down for you so that you can compare different products easily.

Chapter 3

The Last Judgement



TIP #1: Create a short list

Capterra's ChMS software directory has all ~200 [church management solutions](#) listed in one place. Use the filtering tool to check off your must-have features and narrow down the list to a much more manageable size.

The goal is to create a list of 3-5 ChMS solutions that you'll evaluate more closely. But if your requirements are pretty basic, narrowing your results could still leave you with 15, 20, or even more viable options. Alternatively, your needs could be so specific that after filtering the list down, you're only left with 1 result. That's why in [Chapter 2](#) we said to only focus on your top 10-15 features... hopefully those should leave you with a manageable number of options to evaluate.

If they don't or if going through this process is overwhelming—or even just a pain—we're happy to do the work for you. [Just sign up for a free consultation](#) with a Capterra Software Advisor, and we'll create the short list for you.

Narrow Your Choices

Number of Users
100-199 

Deployment
 Web-Based Installed

Features

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accounting (Built-In)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Member Management
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attendance Tracking	<input type="checkbox"/> Pledge Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Calendar Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Management
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Donation Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Worship Plannig

Chapter 3

The Last Judgement



TIP #2: Demo your options

Now that you have your handful of options, it's time for the fun part-- demos! Software demonstrations are the best way to determine which Church Management software fits your needs. Some of these demos happen one-on-one with a sales person (perhaps like spiritual guidance with your pastor), while others are webinars with groups of potential buyers (like a homily at church). Either way, the demos and conversations you'll have with each software company should answer the following questions about your remaining ChMS contenders:

- 1 Does the solution satisfy your most important requirements?
- 2 Does the vendor offer excellent support and speedy service?
- 3 How user-friendly is the solution?
- 4 How compelling are the vendor's testimonials/reviews?
- 5 How easy is the implementation?
- 6 Does the solution require changes to your church processes?
- 7 Does the vendor have customers similar to you?
- 8 How customizable is the solution?
- 9 How innovative is the solution compared to others on the market?
- 10 Does the solution satisfy some of your less important, "nice to have" requirements?



Helpful Tip

In order to compare products, you may want to quantify your answers to the questions so that 1 is "not at all" and 5 is "absolutely."



Interviewing Advice

Live, one-on-one demos are the best because you can control the conversation and ensure that your specific questions are answered.

Chapter 3

The Last Judgement



TIP #3: Get buy-in

When you're demoing and selecting a ChMS, make sure to gather answers to the following questions from each involved party:

ADMINISTRATORS

(Office secretary/Accountant/General Staff)

- 1 How easy is the system to use?
- 2 How flexible and configurable is the system?
- 3 How much access is there to data and reporting, and what does it look like?
- 4 How will the system integrate with other systems and content?
- 5 How do I create a ministry or group?
- 6 How do I track the attendance of members and visitors?

MEMBERS

(Congregation members/Volunteers)

- 1 How easy is the system to use?
- 2 How easily can I search for and access member profiles and directories?
- 3 How can I login and update my own profile?
- 4 How can I filter members and groups to find common interests?
- 5 How easy is it to access the eGiving portal and donate online?
- 6 Can I schedule and manage volunteering activities through the software?

IT DEPARTMENTS

(If you have one)

- 1 Will the ChMS solution be web-based or on-premises? Can we handle one better than the other?
- 2 How much customization is needed?
- 3 How do we rollover from our previous management system?
- 4 How much maintenance and ongoing administration will be necessary?

Chapter 3

The Last Judgement



💡 TIP #4: Compare pricing

There's no simple answer when it comes to ChMS pricing.

Here's a breakdown of how most ChMS providers charge for their software:

Pay-Per-Member/Record - In this model you pay per month or per year, based on how many total members or records you have in your church (often children are not counted as "members", and one "record" may mean one whole family).

💰 **Price Range:** These solutions range from \$0.30-\$2.00 per member/record per month, or a one-time fee that can range from \$150-\$2,000, depending on the number of members/records. Some solutions have additional setup fees.

➔ **Solutions with this Pricing Model:**

By The Book, Churchteams, IconCMO.

Pay-Per-Attendee/Active Member - This is a pricing model in which you pay a certain amount per month, or per year, depending on how many active members or weekly attendees you have. For some solutions, there is an additional setup fee.

💰 **Price Range:** These solutions can be as low as \$0.07 per active member/attendee per month, to \$0.25 per active member/attendee—the more active members/attendees you have, the lower the cost per member/attendee.

➔ **Solutions with this Pricing Model:**

Fellowship One, WebChurch Connect, Church Office Online, Elexio, BVCMS.

License Fee - These solutions have a one-time purchase fee, with occasional yearly update fees.

💰 **Price Range:** These solutions cost more the more features you need. The basic level is \$50-\$500 one time, mid-range (churches with >100 members) is \$500-\$1,000, and high-end (churches with 1,000+ members) is \$5,000-\$15,000.

➔ **Solutions with this Pricing Model*:**

Basic: Donarius, PowerChurch Software, CCIS.
Mid: Church Windows, Excellerate. **High:** Shelby, ACS.

** Note: The number of users is not often a cost driver for church solutions.*

Additional pricing models you may run into include pricing per family or household (ex. IconCMO)..

Chapter 3

The Last Judgement



The great thing about the ChMS software search is that it doesn't have to feel like a trial in the wilderness! Keep this guide close as you go through the buying process, and you'll be sure to make the right choice. Asking yourself the right questions and taking the time to examine your church's specific needs will ensure that you end up with a Church Management system you love today and in the years to come.

And don't forget—you're not on your own! For this particular judgment call, it's okay to ask a friend (and pray!) for help.



Let us be your mentor. We've helped many churches with this and can help you choose the right software too. Just tell us [what you're looking for](#), and we'll get you halfway to the answer in minutes.

Chapter 3

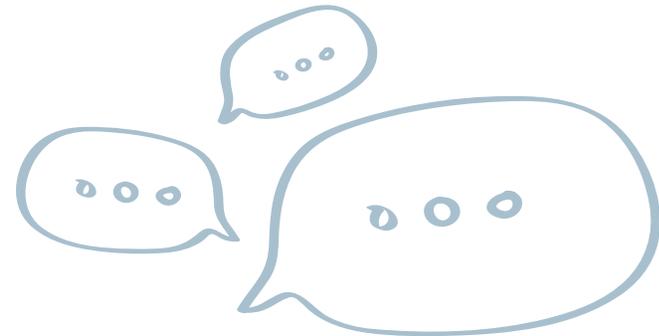
The Last Judgement



WHAT OTHER CHURCH LEADERS ADVISE

Here is some extra advice from your peers:

- ➔ If you are considering buying church management software, do it sooner rather than later. It's easier to install and set up when you have time to do it right. Waiting until you are desperate and don't have the time and energy means you'll make bad decisions.
- ➔ Buy a system with room to grow. The point of having church software is to help you grow your ministry. Make sure you buy one that can handle more than you need today.
- ➔ Think twice about building your own system. It may seem tempting to build something to save a little money, but in the long run you end up spending more. Leave the software to the experts and focus on what you do best...building your ministry.
- ➔ Beware of "free" solutions. You get what you pay for and most often the free system is only an intro system to get you started. Typically you end up having to pay for additional users, features, and usage and you'll be stuck with a system that doesn't really fit.
- ➔ Decide if you're willing to fit your processes to the ChMS or if you need a ChMS that fits your processes. That means you have to know your processes first.



Sources



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LifeWay Research

 <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Churches-not-running-to-cloud-computing>



Contact Us

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Get free expert guidance. Let's talk today!

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