

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT
Grace Church

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—Monika Kirbawy, Controller

Multi-campus church tracks finances with robust cloud solution.

Fast-growing Grace Church believes in sharing “the life-changing story of Jesus,” with thousands of members striving to “Know It, Live It, and Give It Away.” The church expanded from greater Akron, Ohio, where it has six campuses, to launch two campuses in Georgia and one in South Carolina. With a dynamic structure and a desire for greater accountability, church leaders were ready to replace their legacy accounting system with a cloud-based software solution. Grace Church Controller Monika Kirbawy explains why Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT was the right choice.

Q: Describe Grace Church’s structure and how that relates to the church’s finances.

A: We have a parenting model in terms of how we launch new campuses. Our original two greater Akron locations are the “parents,” and each of those campuses has since launched campuses of their own. Each parent campus has an accounting manager who oversees the parent campus and her “children.” Each parent campus and some child campuses have a finance assistant as well.

Grace Church is powered by :
Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT®

The goal is always for our campuses to be self-sufficient, but campuses will assist one another. This once again mirrors the parent-child relationship, where the parent continues to help support the child while encouraging them to be self-sufficient and capable.

Q: Does Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT work well with your model?

A: Absolutely. Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT allows us to produce a variety of financial reports. All these reports can be produced from within the system, so we are no longer exporting and manipulating information. We can produce high-level, organizational reports for our steering teams and administrative board of elders, and then produce the same high-quality reports for specific ministries. Every month, our finance team produces monthly budget reports for our individual ministries, such as children's ministry, student ministry, and creative arts ministry



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Q: Clearly, a finance staff of five is doing a lot to keep up with nine campuses.

A: We run a lean team. We want to accomplish as many economies of scale as possible, one of which is the need to only have one accounting software for nine campus locations. This was part of why Blackbaud was so intriguing to us. We felt like it was going to accomplish many of our needs without a lot of workarounds.

Q: Did you look around a lot when choosing a replacement for your legacy accounting system?

A: We actually first tried to upgrade to the next version of our original system. We started the transition, but the cut-over quickly became a nightmare, so we went back to square one and decided to continue to use the old system for another year and take time to look at other options. I wanted to make sure we ended up with the right product, so I probably explored and investigated a dozen different options, then I narrowed it down to three, received quotes, and went through demos and trials, spoke with referrals, and then selected Blackbaud.

Q: What was your implementation experience like with Blackbaud?

A: The way Blackbaud handled implementation was incredible. I thought it was so well organized and a seamless transition. It was clear what the

expectations were of us as the client and what Blackbaud was going to be responsible for. I thought the weekly touch base with our implementation coach was a key to success; we knew the goals, we knew the benchmarks, and we were able to accomplish it within the timeframe we wanted. Our Blackbaud consultant was a fantastic resource.

Q: What factors shaped your decision to adopt Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT?

A: The biggest factor was our ability to individually track all of our campus locations and simultaneously track each campus' unique projects, mission trips, and events from within the system, as opposed to having spreadsheet upon spreadsheet of information. We were really looking to have all of that in in one space. Secondly, our decision was driven by our desire to undergo a financial audit.

Q: Talk about your goals for accountability with an audit.

A: An external financial audit promotes our interest in being transparent and accountable. We are looking for a vote of confidence: Do you have solid internal controls and are you following those internal controls? Do you have solid practices and procedures? Do you have proper documentation, especially when we are talking about all these campuses?

Q: How does Blackbaud Financial Edge NXT support your audit goals?

A: Blackbaud allowed us to convert from our legacy cash-based accounting system to an accrual system. We were also able to finally produce reliable financial statements for Grace Church of Greater Akron as well as each of her campus locations. The sophisticated and professional nature of Blackbaud provided us with the confidence to proceed with the implementation of an annual financial audit.



Mission trips, events, giving campaigns, and other projects are easily tracked, providing robust, micro-level control.

Q: How important is your ability to track projects?

A: This is incredibly important. We are a project-based organization. Anything outside of the operating budget is tracked as an individual project. I love the ability Blackbaud provides to view project detail. Sometimes we will have dozens of mission trips, events, and giving campaigns going at one time. When you times this by nine, for each campus, you get a lot of projects. Some smaller projects may only have a couple charges to them, but it's the idea of micro-level control—of how you're encumbering money and expecting it to be spent—and your ability to track it in just a robust way.

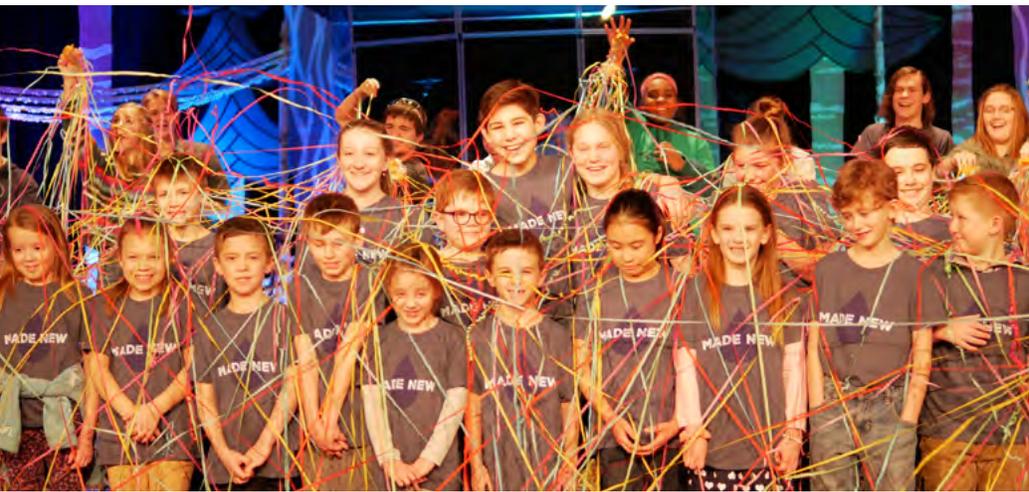


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staff members handle finances for 9 church campuses.



Steering teams, ministry leaders, and the administrative board of elders all receive high-level reports.



Grace Church's children and student ministries seek to provide a solid foundation of biblical knowledge while also offering fun and engaging activities at each of its nine campuses.

Streamline financial processes and ensure integrity.

[Learn more](#)



Monika Kirbawy
Controller

Monika Kirbawy has overseen the finances of Grace Church for eight years. She graduated from The University of Akron with a degree in economics and recently completed her MBA at Grace College. Before her decision to begin her work with Grace Church, Monika was an economist for a local municipality.

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About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, companies, education institutions, healthcare organizations, and the individual change agents who support them.