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Project Pitch: Church Connect+

**Abstract**

This project proposes Church Connect+, a lightweight, Django-based web application designed to improve community engagement and operational efficiency withing small to mid-sized churches. Church Connect+ emphasizes four essential functions, unlike enterprise-level church management systems, which are costly and complex. The four functions are: prayer request management, youth group sign-ups with attendance tracking, digital tithers and offerings, and a weekly announcements board. These features directly address difficult points experienced by local congregations, including inconsistent youth participation, gaps in communication, and the growing demand for digital giving options. The application is designed for rapid iteration, accessibility and transparency, aligning with AI-native, portfolio-driven development practices. The Minimal Viable Artifact (MVA) can be delivered in two weeks, with clear scope boundaries, risk mitigations, and future extensibility.

**Problem**

Small and mid-sized churches play a vital role in fostering community, but they lack effective digital tools for engagement and administration. In practice, here are four challenges that may occur:

1. **Youth group and Young Adult (YA) attendance**: Attendance in youth ministries often fluctuates because there is no simple way for students (and parents) to sign up, get reminders, or track consistency.
2. **Prayer requests**: Members frequently share prayer needs verbally or informally through text messages. Requests may be forgotten or overlooked without a centralized system, and there is no structured way to celebrate answered prayers.
3. **Tithes and offerings**: Many of our members, especially younger ones, prefer to give digitally, but the current solution, isn’t promoted as efficiently. It requires the user to scan a QR code that only lasts a few minutes on screen and may take long because of the different bank applications.
4. **Announcements and Events**: Key updates and opportunities are spread across flyers, bulletins, and verbal reminders, leaving members uninformed.

Commercial church management software tools exist, but they’re either too expensive and have too many features that small churches don’t benefit from. Small churches require an affordable, accessible, and community-centered platform that addresses their core needs.

**Stakeholders**

* **Youth group members & parents**: Sign up for events, receive reminders, and track attendance.
* **Congregation members**: Submit and view prayer requests, tithe online, view announcements.
* **Church leaders/pastors**: Moderate prayer requests, oversee youth/volunteer sign-ups, and ensure accurate communication.
* **Finance/admin staff**: track tithers and offerings in a transparent and secure way, export logs for reporting.

**Scope**

In-scope (MVA, 2 weeks):

* **Prayer Requests Module**: CRUD system for prayer needs, with leader approval and “answered” toggle.
* **Youth group sign-up**: Event listing with slots and simple attendance log.
* **Tithes and offerings module**: Embedded link to Zelle using common banks plus donation log.
* **Announcements Board:** Centralized board for weekly/monthly updates.

Out-of-scope (later iterations):

* Advanced financial tools (accounting. Budget tracking).
* Personalized accounts/profiles.
* Mobile app integration.
* Livestreaming, sermon archiving, or media features.

**Success Metrics**

* **Youth engagement**: increase by 20% in youth sign-ups compared to baseline.
* **Transparency**: exportable weekly prayer requests and digital offerings.
* **Convenience**: At least 25% of offerings submitted digitally within first rollout.
* **Efficiency**: Leaders reduce bulletin preparation time by 30%-40%
* **Community Connection**: Measurable participation in sign-ups, prayer engagement, and digital giving.

**Minimal Viable Artifact (MVA)**

The MVA will consist of four modules:

1. Prayer requests: Members submit, leaders approve, congregation views.
2. Youth Group sign-ups: Event listing + attendance CRUD.
3. Digital Giving: Secure embedded giving plus basic donation tracking.
4. Announcements Board: CRUD system for weekly updates.

This foundation provides immediate value to the congregation while allowing iterative expansion (AI summarization, richer reporting, or mobile reminders).

**Iterative Design Approach**

* Cycle 1 (week 1): Build prayer request CRUD and announcements board.
* Cycle 2 (week 2): Add youth group sign-ups and digital giving.
* Future (Past MVA): AI summarization of prayer requests into bulleting drafts and automatic youth reminders.

**System Sketch:**

A diagram of a software development

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Evidence Base**

* Pew Research Center (2024). *Technology & Religious Life: Digital Transformation of Worship Practices.*
* Lifeway Research (2023). *Why Youth Leave or Stay: Attendance Trends in Faith Communities.*
* WCAG 2.2 Accessibility Standards (2023). *Guidelines for digital accessibility in faith-based apps.*
* Barna Group (2022). *The State of Church Giving and Digital Engagement.*

**Risk Register**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Risk | Impact | Likelihood | Mitigation |
| Low adoption of digital giving | Medium | Medium | Keep both options open; clearly communicate security and trust. |
| Youth don’t consistently sign up despite the new online tool | High | Medium | Pair tool with announcements, SMS/email reminders, and parent involvement. |
| Sensitive prayer requests raise privacy issues | High | Medium | Provide option for “leaders only” requests; enforce moderation workflow. |
| Scope creep (adding livestream, donations tracking, etc.) | Medium | High | Document future features; enforce MVA boundaries. |

**Conclusion**

Church Connect+ addresses the challenges of small to mid-sized congregations by focusing on engagement, transparency, and simplicity. By prioritizing prayer requests, youth sign-ups, digital giving, and announcements, the app offers immediate value to church members and leaders. The two-week MVA scope is both challenging but impactful and ensures the first version can be deployed quickly while leaving room for future growth and AI integration.