

Church Improves Collaboration and Caller Experience

Lake Avenue Church uses unified communications to enhance staff collaboration and improve church members' experience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
LAKE AVENUE CHURCH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious organization Pasadena, California 150 staff members and volunteers
CHALLENGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide excellent member services Be responsive to callers Minimize IT workload and reduce costs
SOLUTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaced PBX system with unified communications, including messaging Provided staff members with unified communications software for voice, voicemail, presence, conferencing, and instant messaging
RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabled collaboration across all departments Made it easier for callers to reach a live person Consolidated systems onto a single platform that the IT department can manage internally

Challenge

Founded in 1896 in Pasadena, California, Lake Avenue Church has grown to occupy six multistory buildings on a campus that spans half a city block, plus two nearby residential offices. Approximately 150 staff members and volunteers work together on worship services, educational programs, community and global outreach, and small groups centered around life stages, shared interests, and common needs.

Staff members on the sprawling church campus rely on the communications system to collaborate with each other and communicate with members. When the old private branch exchange (PBX) system began to fail, the IT staff looked for a new communications system that would:

- Enable collaboration.** The old conferencing system could not support enough participants and lacked password protection. "Our executive staff wanted a more expandable and secure conferencing solution," says David Guzman, IT manager.
- Improve the member experience.** The church wanted to make it easier for callers to reach the right person to address their needs.
- Improve church safety.** If someone dialed 911 from one of the 200 phones on campus, the church wanted the dispatcher to be able to determine the caller's location, expediting help.
- Reduce IT workload.** "Our campus is vast, but our IT staff resources are not," says Guzman. "We need a communications system that is unified, easy to support and lets us quickly introduce new services for our staff and members."

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—David Guzman, IT Manager, Lake Avenue Church

Solution

The Lake Avenue Church IT staff chose the Cisco® Unified Communications solution after ranking several leading solutions based on the responsiveness of the support organizations, technology leadership, commitment to innovation, and other factors. "We wanted a financially stable partner that we could work with for a long time to

come,” says Guzman. “It helped that we have a Cisco network, because our staff already had a foundation to learn management skills.”

Lake Avenue Church engaged FusionStorm, a Cisco Gold Certified Partner, to implement Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition, a single appliance that combines Cisco Unified Communications Manager, Cisco Unity® Connection voice messaging, and Cisco Unified Mobility. FusionStorm also supports the church’s wired and wireless networks, security systems, and data center solutions, which simplifies operations for the Lake Avenue IT department.

Collaboration Tools

FusionStorm installed new IP phones, including two-line Cisco Unified IP Phones 7945G. Some of the church’s traditional phones were retained for areas without an IP network connection. The church can replace these phones gradually, as budget permits. Approximately 100 staff members also use Cisco Unified Personal Communicator software on their PCs for directory, voicemail access, presence status, and instant messaging. Before staff members call colleagues, they can check the colleagues’ presence information to see if they are available and how they prefer to be reached. “If someone is on the phone or in a meeting and we need a quick answer, we can send an instant message,” Guzman says. Staff members can also use presence status to see who is currently available in a certain area of the campus.

Staff members like the different voicemail options in Cisco Unity Connection. Some of them use the Visual Voicemail feature, which lets them see a list of messages on the built-in display of their Cisco Unified IP phone instead of dialing in. Others use the built-in speech recognition features to manage voicemail with spoken commands, such as “Play message from Dave Guzman” or “Delete message.” Speech recognition is especially useful for checking voicemail from the car, because California requires motorists to use a hands-free device.

Wireless IP Phones

Church custodians carry Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones 7921G so that people can quickly reach them, even in basements or parking lots, where cellular reception is poor. Members as well as outside groups that rent church rooms appreciate being able to reach custodians right away. The church plans to also provide wireless IP phones to the security department and school administrators.

Physical Security

The same Cisco Integrated Services Router 3825 that connects the unified communications system to the WAN and the public switched telephone network also supports video surveillance. The IT staff only needed to add a Cisco Physical Security Network Module. “We spent under US\$3000, less than one-half the cost of a completely new unit,” says Guzman. The church currently uses analog video surveillance cameras, and will later add IP cameras for sharper image quality, without any additional infrastructure costs beyond a camera and the necessary wiring.

Results

Improved Collaboration

Lake Avenue Church staff can collaborate more easily using features like presence, instant messaging, and visual voicemail. “Cisco collaboration tools enable us to more efficiently work together, despite our far-flung campus,” says Emil Tulcan, director of communications and technology. As an example, counselors don’t take phone calls during a counseling session. Now, someone who needs to notify a counselor about an emergency can just send an instant message.

Increased Productivity

Features like visual voicemail, speech recognition, and presence save time every day. Staff members can more quickly reach out to each other by just clicking to dial hyperlinked telephone numbers in the church directory.

Improved Caller Experience

Members and other outside callers can more easily reach church staff. If the receptionist cannot answer a call, the Automated Attendant prompts the caller to select a department. All people in that department can answer the call from their own phones. And when staff members will be away from their desks, they can use the Cisco Unified Mobility feature to specify that calls to their office phone should ring another phone number. “Cisco Unified Mobility transfers the effort and control from the IT department to our staff,” says Tulcan.

Reduced IT Workload

“Unified management is very important to us,” says Guzman. “It makes us more productive, which is especially important for a relatively small IT group.” IT staff save more time with single sign-on, made possible because Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition integrates with the church’s user directory server.

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—Emil Tulcan, Director of Communications and Technology, Lake Avenue Church

Support for Working from Home

The City of Pasadena encourages employers to offer a work-at-home option to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. Lake Avenue Church staff members can work from home using Cisco Unified Personal Communicator on their home PC or laptop. They can connect securely to the church network and can place and receive calls using their usual office phone number, see coworkers’ presence status, send instant messages, and access their office voicemail account. “Cisco Unified Communications is making the work-at-home option more affordable and realistic for us because we don’t need to purchase any additional equipment,” says Tulcan.

Energy Savings

The Cisco Unified Communications system is much smaller than the old PBX system, consuming less energy and freeing up server room space for new equipment. “We plan to use the Cisco EnergyWise technology in our Cisco Catalyst switches to power down the Cisco Unified IP Phones when we’re not using them,” says Guzman. EnergyWise can also control the Cisco Aironet® wireless access points, network printers, building lighting, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to reduce energy consumption during non-working hours.

Next Steps

Lake Avenue Church plans to gradually introduce more features that increase the value of the Cisco Unified Communications platform. “We give staff a chance to become comfortable with one new feature before we introduce the next,” says Tulcan. “Cisco Unified Communications is very simple, so new features don’t take long to learn.” Plans under consideration include:

- **Enhanced safety:** When someone places a 911 call from any location on campus, the public safety answering point receives the building and floor location, not just the church’s main address. “If someone calls from the third floor of our Family Life building, the paramedics don’t have to spend the time to search 240,000 square feet of building space to find the caller,” Tulcan says.
- **Emergency preparedness:** The church can send pages through the IP phones using InformaCast software from Singlewire Software, a Cisco developer network partner.
- **Voice, video, and web conferencing:** The church is considering Cisco Unified MeetingPlace® Express or Cisco WebEx™.

- **Integration with the church's member database:** The church would like staff members to see the caller's directory information on their PC when they receive a call, so that they can greet the caller by name.
- **Digital signage:** The church is considering using the Cisco Digital Media System to send rich-media content to digital signs throughout the campus, to promote upcoming events, show meeting locations, and display emergency alerts.

The IT budget is just 5.5 percent of the Lake Avenue Church's total budget, a much lower percentage than in corporate environments. "We need to maximize the returns from every dollar we spend," says Tulcan. "As we move forward, Cisco Unified Communications will let us continually enhance collaboration with small incremental investments."

For More Information

To learn more about Cisco Unified Communications visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications.

To learn more about Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition, visit: www.cisco.com/go/cmbe

To learn more about Cisco Integrated Services Routers, visit: www.cisco.com/go/isr

PRODUCT LIST

Switching and Routing

- Cisco Catalyst® Switch 3750G and 2960G with Cisco EnergyWise technology
- Cisco 3825 Integrated Services Router (ISR)
- Cisco Physical Security Network Module for the Cisco ISR

Cisco Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition, including:
 - Cisco Unified Communications Manager
 - Cisco Unity Connection Unified Messaging
 - Cisco Unified Mobility
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7945G and 7911G
- Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones 7921G
- Cisco Unified Communications Widgets: Visual Voicemail, Phone Designer, and Click to Call
- Cisco Unified Presence
- Cisco Unified Personal Communicator
- Cisco IP Communicator
- Cisco VG224 Analog Voice Gateways for fax machines

Physical Security

- Cisco IP Video Surveillance 16-Port Analog Video Gateway (AVG) Network Module
- Cisco Video Management and Storage System (VMSS) Network Module



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