

AT&T Business keeps Bethlehem Baptist Church connected

- **Business needs** - Better and more affordable ways for staff and parishioners to manage the church's ministries
- **Networking solution** - A cloud-based voice, fax, text, and conferencing system and a robust dedicated internet service to support the church's work
- **Business value** - Increased efficiency and the ability to stream religious services to the homes of the faithful who are unable to attend services in person
- **Industry focus** - Christian church
- **Size** - 250 members

About Bethlehem Baptist Church

For 173 years Bethlehem Baptist Church has ministered to Covington, Georgia. From its initial meetings in the home of its first pastor, the church has grown to include about 250 members who worship in a red brick church.

The situation

Like many churches, Bethlehem Baptist Church is careful with money. Officials wanted to better share the word of God by replacing the church's aging telephone lines and internet service but needed a cost-effective way to support the necessary upgrades.

Solution

AT&T Business replaced the church's phone lines with AT&T Office@Hand, an affordable voice-over-IP solution that provides voice, fax, text messaging, and audio and video conferencing. Church staff also chose AT&T Dedicated Internet to deliver highly secure connectivity to support operations, including the streaming of worship services.

A legacy of sharing the word

Since 1849 the faithful of Covington, Georgia have come together to worship at Bethlehem Baptist Church. The congregation's earliest gatherings took place in the home of Reverend Berry Fish, but his flock grew so quickly that soon he was holding services in a log hut near the town's Central Depot.

Over the years the church moved into a larger building, began providing full-time worship services, and added programs and classes to meet the spiritual and educational needs of its congregation and the community. Pastors and congregants participate in many active ministries, including auxiliaries, choirs, Sunday School, and prayer groups. "The ultimate goal of any church is to spread the word of God," said Agnes Morehead, Bethlehem Baptist Church treasurer.

The congregation has been blessed with pastors who serve long tenures. "We haven't had a lot of pastors in our 173 years; I think it's fewer than 15," she said. The congregation has a similar commitment to the church. "There is just a rich history of people dedicated to serving the community and God. And there are still members who are descendants of those parishioners who established the church back in 1849."

New ways to worship

Bethlehem Baptist Church's only full-time employee is Pastor Ronnie M. Thomas, Jr. Part-time staff and volunteers perform many of the tasks necessary to support the church. This meant that there was not always a person around to answer the phone, so the church relied on an answering machine.

"At one point the voicemail was only set up for the pastor, so he would get all the calls pertaining to every need that a parishioner or the community may have. And then he would just try to pass the messages on," Morehead said. "We wanted to move to an automated voicemail system."

In addition, the church wanted to upgrade its internet service. Thanks to the vision of Pastor Thomas, Bethlehem Baptist Church began livestreaming its services well before the COVID outbreak. "And it was not just on Sundays; he streamed a Bible class on Wednesdays and a Saturday greeting," Morehead said.

While the congregation appreciated the opportunity to participate via livestream, Pastor Thomas and his team wanted to improve the technical quality. "Upload time was slow, and there was a lag," Morehead said. A long relationship with AT&T led the church to seek recommendations there for improving church telecommunications.

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Agnes Morehead
Treasurer, Bethlehem Baptist Church

Better ways to work

An AT&T Business representative suggested AT&T Office@Hand, a cloud-based system that would enable callers to connect more quickly with the person they wish to reach. “He was very patient with us; he listened to our questions and helped to assess our needs and point us in the right direction,” she said. “He didn’t just try to sell us something.”

AT&T Office@Hand also provides fax, text messaging, and audio and video conferencing capabilities. The service supported the work of the church staff and parishioners, especially during the pandemic when they could not meet in person.

“From a financial standpoint, it was great, because it freed up funds to do other things,” Morehead said. “We didn’t have to juggle our finances to purchase the AT&T equipment and stay up with technology.”

Each member of the church staff could now have a separate mailbox, which meant that Pastor Thomas no longer had to sort through all the messages and route them to the person who could best handle each one. AT&T Office@Hand enables the pastor and staff to retrieve their messages remotely. “That’s one of the features that the church secretary loved,” Morehead said. “She could access messages from home during the pandemic, without having to go to the church.”

Staying connected with the community

The church’s AT&T Business account representative also recommended AT&T Dedicated Internet service, which provides connectivity for use only by the church. The service is proactively monitored and supported 24/7 by an expert AT&T team. It also provides the connectivity that enables AT&T Office@Hand.

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Treasurer, Bethlehem Baptist Church



AT&T Dedicated Internet gives the church super fast speeds to support its outreach to the community. Even though most parishioners have returned to attending services in person, some cautious members continue to participate in services over the internet.

“We still plan to stream all our services, to support members who are still a little skeptical and some who just became comfortable staying at home,” Morehead said. The streaming also lets members attend services when they are traveling.

“AT&T allows us to stay connected with the community and the church as a whole and that is major. AT&T has definitely helped us go beyond what we were able to do before.”

She also believes that AT&T will help support the pastor’s vision for the future. “As Pastor Thomas presents ideas that require technology, AT&T will be our first go-to,” she said.

First-class customer service

Morehead said the church gives a lot of credit for the success of the technology to its AT&T account representative. “He was great and very patient; he didn’t mind explaining things more than once. We’re very appreciative.”

“I don’t blow smoke and I don’t give false praises. I try to be as honest and straightforward as I can, so I’m not exaggerating anything,” she said. “He was

just very professional and knowledgeable in leading us. He could give a class on the best way to conduct customer service.”

She was impressed that her account representative didn’t hesitate to ask his colleagues for advice when necessary. “He wasn’t afraid to reach out to other AT&T members if he wasn’t sure about something. And to me, that’s a leader—to be able to share what you know but be able to admit what you don’t know. That speaks volumes.”

Morehead and her colleagues at Bethlehem Baptist Church also appreciate the expertise of the AT&T team. “AT&T is very good at what they do, and their delivery of the products we needed was excellent. From the installation of the wiring to the actual end product, I was very pleased,” she said.

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