

## Success Story

# Fast-growing church modernizes with cloud financial management

Sandals Church

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### Amber Cheong

Director of Finance, Sandals Church

### Company overview

Founded in 1997 and headquartered in Riverside, California, Sandals Church attracts 11,000 attendees to weekly services at nine campus locations in Southern California, and an additional 4,000 attendees for online broadcasts. With a goal “to be real with ourselves, God and others,” Sandals Church is pursuing a vision of opening 500 campuses worldwide.

### Executive summary

Previous software:

- Logos Accounting

### Results with Sage Intacct

- New insights help power rapid growth in donations and membership.
- Monthly close accelerated 450%, from 45 to 10 days.
- Accounting productivity up 20%, finance efficiency up 45%.
- Real-time financial management across multiple campuses and ministries.



**SANDALS  
CHURCH**



Sage

**Company**  
Sandals Church

**Location**  
California, US

**Industry**  
Nonprofit

**Sage Products**  
Sage Intacct



### **Fast-growing church modernizes with cloud financial management**

Sandals Church has come a long way since its founder, Pastor Matt Brown, and his wife Tammy hosted an inaugural meeting of eight people in their living room in 1997. Today, Sandals Church has nine campuses across southern California that attract 11,000 parishioners weekly. Another 4,000 people around the world tune in for online services. Based in Riverside, California, the Southern Baptist church is pursuing a vision of opening 500 campuses worldwide. Managing continued expansion and rising revenue, 90% of which comes from parishioner tithing, meant the church needed to upgrade to a modern and sophisticated financial management platform.

Previously, Sandals Church used an accounting application from Logos, a church management software vendor. As Director of Finance Amber Cheong explains it, a linear chart of accounts model in Logos meant that Sandals Church had an unwieldy 30 charts of account — and that was when the church had just three campuses. That burdened the accounting team with manual work, heavy use of spreadsheets, and dragged out the monthly close to 45 days. Plus, limited visibility into financials could make it challenging for church leaders to track spending and make budgetary decisions. “Logos could give us a standard financial statement to present to the board, but it was inflexible and didn’t deliver the insights we wanted,” Amber said.

Sandals Church found the ideal solution with Sage Intacct. In three years on the Sage Intacct cloud platform, the church has seen annual growth of 25% in donations, and 30% in attendance. It’s opened six new campuses, with four more in the pipeline for 2019 under a \$20 million budget, up from \$18 million in 2018. New insights and scalability through Sage Intacct are helping Sandals Church manage its finances with much greater speed and transparency as it continues its rapid growth.



Sandals Church needed flexibility, and Sage Intacct provided that.

### **New financial insights help power rapid growth**

A flexible chart of accounts and dimensional reporting in Sage Intacct were key considerations for Sandals Church in its comparison against Microsoft Dynamics GP, SAP, and Shelby Systems, a church management software vendor. “We liked the fact that the Sage Intacct chart of accounts is customizable, and the flexibility of creating dimensions whenever and wherever we need to,” Amber said. “Church accounting is complex, so it’s very useful for us to filter how each ministry is doing per location for each event, or any way we’d like to. We need flexibility, and Sage Intacct provides that,” Amber stated.

Now, Sandals Church has on-demand visibility into real-time financial data to manage costs, adjust revenue targets, and pursue growth. Roughly 60 members of the church’s 153-person workforce use Sage Intacct dashboards, including executives, departmental managers, and campus directors. “Before, they had to wait until accounting closed the month and emailed them a report,” Amber said, “Now they go online and see how they’re doing in their department or campus in real time,” Amber said. And executives have new ability to track P&L, balance sheets, and metrics such as costs per parishioner and staffing ratios. That supports informed decision-making, from ramping up marketing efforts to opening a new campus.

New insights in Sage Intacct have been instrumental in supporting double-digit gains in tithing and attendance, and the church is better able to grow summer camp, youth, and other service programs that generate about 10% of revenue. For instance, Sandals Church realized it was losing significant money on its camp program once it deployed Sage Intacct. Now, it can also drill into camp attendance by campus and identify campuses that should have higher camp attendance. “Our executives now know where we stand financially,” Amber said. Amber further mentioned that, “The new insights we have with Sage Intacct have been extremely valuable in supporting our growth and our mission.”



### **Big gains in closing speed and finance productivity**

Amber's team now has ample time for higher-value strategic work and thanks to dramatically improved efficiencies gained with Sage Intacct. The monthly close, for instance, has accelerated 450% — from 45 days to just 10 days. Productivity of the accounting team has risen by 20%, while efficiency is up an estimated 45% in terms of faster processes and less manual effort. Rather than wrestling with dozens of charts of accounts, the accounting team seamlessly consolidates financials across seven entities. Year-end audit processes are 40% faster, and Amber's team can start work on next year's budget in October or November — not August as it did in the past.

“Because we have Sage Intacct to manage the day-to-day, we don't need to worry much about financial accuracy and instead focus more on strategy goals and more effectively managing finances,” Amber said. That includes the use of Sage Intacct for balance sheet, P&L, and cash flow reporting, and an integrated solution from Adaptive Insights for forecasting and scenario planning. Ease of use is a key factor in helping Sandals Church transform its accounting function. It also makes Sage Intacct accessible to non-accounting personnel who interact with dashboards and helps the accounting team utilize volunteers for data entry for payroll, accounts payables, deposits, and more.

Amber made that point to a sister church in Southern California, Saddleback Church, as Saddleback considered its accounting platform options. “I told Saddleback that Sage Intacct changed our church because it provides so much ease of use with so little time needed for training,” Amber said. “It makes all the sense in the world to move to Sage Intacct because ministry people aren't necessarily the best with numbers, and Sage Intacct makes it easy for them,” Amber remarks.

