Simple Tips to Create a Church Office You Can Trust

Churches are entrusted with a wealth of private information about individuals in its congregation. They expect you to keep it private. With these simple tips, you can be well on your way to becoming a church office your congregation trusts.

Information Best Practices

   * **Limit access to paper records.** Paper records are an obvious privacy risk. Store them securely and limit access only to those who need it.

   * **Secure electronic records.** Today's churches store a significant amount of information electronically. Be sure to secure electronic information included in emails, financial records and employee evaluations.

   * **What's yours is yours.** While the temptation is there, make it a practice not to share login names and passwords. Establish a tiered system of access based on who is logging into the system.

   * **When in doubt, leave it out**. Private information is easily shared in everyday conversations. Even something as harmless as explaining why a particular person missed a scheduled nursery assignment can convey details that should not have been shared with others.

   * **Parishioners in hospital.** Patients have more control today over how health information is shared. Be sure you understand the rules before disclosing private health information through prayer lists and bulletin updates.

Build a Record Retention Policy

   * **Obey the law.** Build your retention policy on solid ground. Start by reviewing legal requirements for document retention.

   * **Establish an expiration date.** Develop a system for identifying documents that no longer need to be retained. When the expiration date comes around, take a second look before destroying it.

   * **Destroy records properly.** The church office is no place to cut corners on document destruction. Be sure to properly destroy hard files and have a plan for dealing with expired electronic information.