

# Wisconsin Chamber of Faith — Modernizing Membership & Operations

**Client:** Wisconsin Chamber of Faith (WI-COF) · **URL:** thechamberoffaith.com

**Engagement:** Aug–Oct 2025 (*assumption; confirm*)

**Mission:** Connecting businesses, ministries, and individuals through shared values and collaborative growth.

**Partner:** Five Letter Agency (FLA) — Strategy, design, engineering, and rollout.

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## Summary

### The challenge (Before)

- Fragmented stack: MembershipWorks, Constant Contact, Squarespace, PayPal, Microsoft 365.
- Rising SaaS costs and rigid workflows that no longer matched how WI-COF operates.
- Outdated site content and difficult updates for non-technical staff.
- Email list quality degraded over years ( $\approx 10\%$  bounces); renewal ops manual and error-prone.
- Growth beyond Milwaukee would multiply admin work and costs.

### The solution

FLA built a **custom admin portal + public site** that consolidates membership, payments, email, and content updates into one workflow tailored to WI-COF. Non-technical staff can publish updates, manage members, and run renewals in minutes.

**Stack:** Next.js 14 (app router), Convex (data + server functions), Clerk (auth/roles), Vercel (hosting), SendGrid (email).

**Payments:** PayPal Subscriptions + discrete links; webhooks for receipts, membership state, and dunning.

**Email:** SendGrid dynamic templates, ASM groups, DMARC/SPF/DKIM alignment, list hygiene.

### Outcomes (After)

- **Time saved:** 5+ hours/week reclaimed from manual renewals and multi-tool updates.

- **Costs:** Project delivered  $\approx 3\times$  **less** than agency quotes; **5-year SaaS savings** projected **\$15k+**; avoided  $\approx$  **\$20k** in one-off feature/customization fees.
- **Deliverability:** Bounce rate  $\sim 10\%$   $\rightarrow <1\%$  after hygiene + authenticated sending (*TBC*); opens/clicks trending up (*TBC*).
- **Renewals:** Prior  $\approx 75\%$ ; early cohort trending **+5–13 pp** (*TBC as annual cycle completes*).
- **Content:** Site brought fully current with **2+ years** of updates; non-technical edits now self-serve.
- **Board impact:** Green-lit continued build-out for networking tools; FLA awarded **Arn Quakkellar Legacy Grant** for public-service automation/AI work.

“Use this as a template for any values-driven org: consolidate, automate, and put staff back in front of people—not dashboards.”

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## Detailed Case Study

### Context & Goals

WI-COF needed a modern platform to **scale beyond Milwaukee**, reduce reliance on **costly, rigid SaaS**, and restore **operational agility**. FLA proposed a phased, custom portal that retains only the parts of the legacy stack that add clear value.

### Starting point (Before)

- **Tools:** MembershipWorks, Constant Contact, Squarespace, PayPal, Microsoft 365.
- **Pain:** Tool sprawl, rising costs, slow content updates, list decay, manual renewals, limited reporting.
- **Baseline metrics:**
  - Traffic: minimal (no reliable baseline; instrumentation added).
  - Conversions/donations: unknown; proxy set to **membership renewal count** going forward.
  - Renewal rate:  **$\sim 75\%$**  (self-reported).
  - Email:  **$\sim 10\%$  bounce**; authentication incomplete.
  - Admin time: **10+ hrs/week** maintaining outdated pages/workflows.

- SaaS spend: **~\$95/mo** (ex-soft costs; did not include future per-seat or add-on escalators).

## What we built (Solution)

- **Unified admin portal** with role-based access (staff, chapter leads, volunteers) and audit logs.
- **Content management for non-technical staff** (news, events, resources) with live preview & rollback.
- **Membership system** (tiers, chapter affiliation, renewal dates, status, payment history).
- **Payments:** PayPal Subscriptions & discrete links; webhook pipeline for receipts, renewal status, and dunning; exportable ledger for finance/audit.
- **Email & messaging:** SendGrid dynamic templates, ASM groups (Announcements, Renewals, Events), bounce/complaint handling; DMARC/SPF/DKIM alignment; list cleanup and opt-in flows.
- **Reporting:** At-a-glance dashboard for renewals due, failed payments, chapter growth, and email KPIs.
- **Ops automation:** 30/7/1-day renewal nudges, welcome series, receipt PDFs, role auto-assignment by plan/chapter.

## Tech & Hosting

- **Next.js 14** (App Router) for the site/admin UI.
- **Convex** as data store & serverless functions (schema-migrated, row-level security).
- **Clerk** for authentication, SSO, and roles.
- **Vercel** for deploys, previews, and edge caching.
- **SendGrid** for email; DNS updated for DMARC/SPF/DKIM.

## Constraints & how we handled them

- **Zero-downtime cutover:** Staged DNS and content freeze; parallel runs for renewals during switchover week.
- **Legacy exports:** Inconsistent MembershipWorks fields; built mappers and validation to normalize.

- **List hygiene:** Deferred blasts until authentication + suppression lists set; re-permissioned stale contacts.
- **Board governance:** Weekly demos; acceptance gates tied to chapter-expansion milestones.

## Outcomes (After)

### Quant (current & projected)

- **Admin time:** 10+ → **≤5 hrs/week** (content + renewals).
- **Renewals:** 75% → **80–88%** (early; confirm after full annual cycle).
- **Deliverability:** ~10% bounces → **<1%**; opens +8–15 pp (*TBC after 90 days steady-state*).
- **Page performance:** LCP **<2.0s** on 4G; Core Web Vitals pass (*TBC with Search Console*).
- **Costs:** ≈ **3× cheaper** than competing quotes; **5-year SaaS savings \$15k+**; avoided ≈ **\$20k** in custom add-ons.

### Qual

- Site content current; staff can ship updates without vendor tickets.
- Fewer support questions from members; clearer renewal status.
- Board confidence increased; roadmap funded for networking features.

## Evidence & attribution

- **Screenshots:** Before/after pages, admin portal, dashboards, email auth & bounce reports.
- **Testimonial:** *Nick Galezewski — Executive Director*; Quote Provided.
- **Logo use:** Approved (assets on file).
- **Grant/recognition:** FLA received **Arn Quakkellar Legacy Grant**; Board green-lit phase 2 networking features.

## Budget, timeline, and why it was cost-effective

- **Timeline:** Scoped → Board approval → Build → Launch in **≈10 weeks**.
- **Why it pencils out:** Consolidation eliminates overlapping seats and per-feature upcharges; automation reduces recurring staff time; custom fit avoids vendor lock-in and price hikes.

## Risks & mitigations

- **Payment edge cases:** Handled upgrade/downgrade and past-due states via webhook-driven ledger + admin overrides.
- **Email compliance:** CAN-SPAM, opt-outs via ASM groups; verified sender + domain alignment.
- **Data integrity:** Import validators; reversible migrations; nightly backups.

## Accessibility & privacy

- **WCAG 2.2 AA:** color contrast checks, keyboard navigation, focus states, form labels/ARIA, skip links, semantic headings, alt text policy.
- **PII:** Role-based access; encrypted transport; least-privilege admin tools; audit trail for member edits; export & delete on request.

## What's next (Roadmap)

- **Member directory & offers** with granular privacy controls.
- **Events & ticketing** (RSVP, volunteer shifts, QR check-in).
- **Chapter hubs** and leader tools; content delegation.
- **Networking graph** (who-knows-who, intros, needs/offers).
- **Job board & vendor marketplace.**
- **Analytics:** Chapter growth, engagement cohorts, renewal predictors.

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## Transferable Playbook

1. **Consolidate** the stack to a custom portal that mirrors your real workflows.

2. **Authenticate & clean** email; separate announcements vs renewals for consent.
  3. **Automate the boring** (renewals, receipts, onboarding, dunning).
  4. **Instrument** what matters (renewals, admin time, deliverability, costs).
  5. **Iterate** with short board-demo loops and reversible migrations.
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## Quick Fact Box

- 5+ staff hours/week saved
- 3× cheaper than alternatives
- \$15k+ five-year SaaS savings
- Bounce rate ~10% → <1% (*TBC*)
- Renewal rate 75% → 80–88% (*early; TBC*)