ISONAS™ Takes Access Control To The Clouds For Historical Alabama Church With Its Cost-Effective Pure IP Solution.

The Oakwood University Church located in Huntsville, Alabama provides spiritual nurture to over 2,000 members and 1,600 students on the campus of Oakwood University, a Historical African American University founded in 1896. Oakwood University Church is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a world-wide organization with more than 19 million members in countries around the world. The church was looking for a way to secure their facility while seamlessly executing their prime objective of meeting the spiritual needs of its congregants.

In the Spring of 2016, Oakwood University Church security personnel conducted a comprehensive security assessment of the campus and submitted its recommendations to the church's Senior Pastor, Dr. Carlton Byrd. The assessment uncovered that the church needed to improve security at their facilities and make major changes in the way access was controlled. Instead of having hundreds of keys assigned to staff members; the church needed to control access electronically. When the new Family Life Center building was approved for construction in December 2016, a major requirement was to wire all entrances and doors for an automated entry system. To meet this new requirement, the church needed to find an access control solution that was easy to manage from one unified platform, while also integrating seamlessly with its existing video surveillance system.

The Challenge

With no access control system in place, it was difficult for Oakwood University Church to track who was going in and out of their facilities daily. When they needed to give access to someone after hours, certain church members would be required to drive a long distance to an Associate Pastor's home just to pick up a key to open the facility. They were also required to then drive back to return the key to the pastor; making it a cumbersome task. In many cases, personnel would leave without notification and not turn in their keys; making it difficult for the management team to control future access. Instead, the church was looking to tailor access profiles for each user based on their roles and responsibilities. They wanted to ensure that a person's access could be controlled with a set of constraints that allowed an individual to access a certain area at a specific time.

Photo by Joseph Booth Jr.

In addition, the church was certainly not prepared for an active shooter incident and knew it needed to make important changes to their security. As a preventative measure, management was looking to implement an automated access control system that offered the security of remote management. It was important to Oakwood University Church to have the ability to lock all doors with a single keystroke remotely in the event of a lockdown situation. A cost-effective cloud-based access control system was needed to make the church a safe haven for its members and students and alleviate all these access issues.

Keeping It Pure With ISONAS

ISONAS, a leading Colorado-based Pure IP access control manufacturer was selected by Oakwood University Church primarily because of its cloud-based access control management capability. A local ISONAS certified integrator was called in to assess the church's facilities and make recommendations to improve safety. Digital Support Systems is a leading integration firm that combines state-of-the-art software with hardware innovation to connect diverse access control artifacts over a cloud-based IP infrastructure. *"Over the past year, Digital Support Systems has become enamored with ISONAS's Pure IP cloud-based access control solutions and has helped push the IP revolution forward by steering customers away from traditional panel-based access control systems,"* states Jim Wilson, System Analyst at Digital Support Systems. After careful review by Digital Support Systems and ISONAS, it was determined that it would be best to outfit the church in five phases over the period of 5 years.

By using a phased approach, it allowed the church to slowly build a cost-effective powerful integrated access control system on one unified platform. Both ISONAS and Digital Support Systems customized the solution based on the church's needs. Phase 1 consisted of 14 doors in the administrative complex being outfitted with the ISONAS RC-04 reader-controllers. RC-04 reader-controllers from ISONAS, deliver advanced technical functionality with an easy installation process. Phase 2 consisted of outfitting 27 doors in the church's new Family Life Center which opened back in February, 2018. Phase 3 included adding ISONAS readers to 14 more doors in the administrative wing of the church. With 55 readers installed in 2019, Phase 4 will add on 14 double doors surrounding the sanctuary on both upper and lower levels and Phase 5 would complete the remaining 22 doors; bringing the total number of ISONAS readers in a five-year time span to 91.

In addition to the ISONAS hardware, the ISONAS Pure Access Software was implemented to give the church remote access capabilities. Pure Access, ISONAS's industry-leading software, is a cloud-based access control application that provides users the ability to manage their access control from anywhere at any time, on any device. By using both the ISONAS hardware and software solution together, the church was able to improve security and specifically tailor access to each user and remove access immediately upon termination. In addition, door groups can now be locked and unlocked automatically as the church had a mapping of all areas on a detailed floor plan that gave a graphical representation of all reader locations. The church also benefited significantly by not having to rely on costly personnel to lock and unlock specific areas as the church could now make these types of requests remotely on their mobile phone. Unscheduled openings could also be implemented remotely with all entries logged for auditing purposes.

Access Control Solution Brings Church To A Higher Power

"The support we received from both ISONAS & Digital Support Systems has been stellar. They have provided onsite training at no extra charge and are responsive to any requests we have made over the course of this project," states Dr. Carlton P. Byrd, Senior Pastor at Oakwood University Church. *"This has been the primary reason why the ISONAS Pure IP solution has been selected as the perfect fit for us."* The ability to lock-down the entire facility with a single keystroke is a 'tour de force' in the industry and we believe that it is an investment well spent…said Pastor Byrd.

The access control project has been a huge success in terms of establishing a structured mechanism for managing the flow of individuals within the facility. The primary challenge encountered was how to configure the access control system to accommodate the various traffic patterns contingent with church life. *I believe that we have succeeded in this regard. Without a doubt, this would not be possible without the dedicated efforts of ISONAS and Jim Wilson and the Digital Support Systems Team…said Pastor Byrd.*

Oakwood University Church has come to understand the importance of combining technology with ministry in a way that has allowed the church to secure their facility, while seamlessly executing the prime objectives of meeting the spiritual needs of its congregants. The church has realized a cost savings on average of $3,500 in physical key management within the past year by not having to reissue master keys and change locks anymore. Now that they had a secure and scalable access control system in place, the church could expand and add to the system seamlessly. With a total of approximately 55 readers installed and 44 more to be installed within the next year, plus over 75 video surveillance cameras on the premises; the church has reached a higher power by having a significant threat management capability behind them.