

GREAT SPIRIT SYSTEMS CORPORATION

The
Eagle Eye
Monthly Newsletter



August 2008



**A WORD
 FROM
 THE
 PRES...**

***The Hidden Costs of
 Customization***

In this issue I am returning to my series of articles on our redevelopment of MissionBase and UMCDData.com into an up-to-date, internet-based program.

As many of you know, MissionBase itself began twelve years ago as a Microsoft Access based product called Mission Southwest. It has gone through numerous upgrades and facelifts during its existence. Some of these have been minor, and some have been major, such as our change of the underlying database product and our recent Addressing upgrade (see Bill's article for the latest on this). One of the things that has occurred over the years relates to special needs and requests. These have sometimes resulted in the development of customized code within the MissionBase program. And while we have always tried to broaden enhancements whenever possible so everyone can benefit from them; there have been some requests that relate only to a specific customer. This may be the result of specific annual conference legislation affecting formulae or unique ministry programs.

Customized code is always more costly and troublesome to maintain than generic code. It is more costly because it is specific to one customer, and we are unable to pass the development costs of special requests on to all customers. They are paid by the customer needing the development, and to the best of our ability any maintenance on that code over time is also billed back to that customer. There is also a cost in staff time, since we do not have enough customization requests to hire someone for this purpose alone and therefore we must extend development schedules in order to address the customization requests.

Given these factors, as we redevelop MissionBase and UMCDData.com using a new programming language and platform (see my [May EE article](#)), we will be addressing areas of customized code by attempting to create flexible, configurable options whenever we can. This will allow us, and you, to set options within the program to create the same result as the current customized program. One specific area which we see as a candidate for this approach is in the setting of billing premiums within the Benefits module.

While we aim to reduce our level of single instances of customization in our future software, we are very aware this approach will not be applicable in some areas, such as the CRSP formulae. These are too varied and specific for configurable options to do the job right, and will need to remain within the realm of customized code.

Moving forward, please be assured that our mission is to always provide you with the software you need for an efficient operation. With this in mind, we will always try to keep your best interests in mind by carefully evaluating customization requests with you and assisting in weighing the long-term costs to you of embedding customized coding into our product. In many cases the solutions to your needs may be met without resorting to customized coding, and we will work with you to identify those when applicable.

Do let me know if you have questions regarding our future direction in relation

Our current Add-on modules:

- Benefits (Pension & Medical, Flex, & Life Insurance billing)
- Property & Liability Insurance billing
- Event Registration
- Cabinet Decision Support
- Certified Leadership (Safe Sanctuary)
- Candidacy Process tracking
- Year-End Statistics (Tables 1,2,3)
- Church Remittance
- Online Local Church Leadership
- Online Statistics entry
- Online Event Registration
- Onsite & web-based training

For more information on any of these modules, contact lori@greatspirit.com

GSS Schedule

For your convenience, these are the dates GSS staff are "out of the office" and/or unavailable.

Dates Unavailable:

Al Fifhouse:	Sept. 9-10
Bill Johnson:	Sept. 17-22
Lori Smith:	Sept. 1-7, 10-11
Jacob Fifhouse:	Sept. 15
Lyndzie Fifhouse:	Sept. 9-10

GoTo Meeting

New Contact Information form Training:

With the release of our new Contact Information features in MissionBase, we decided to offer training session at no cost to assist our users in the transition from the old Contact Information form. The GoToMeeting tool allows 15 users to join the online training per session. These will be reserved on a first come/first serve basis. To participate, please click the session below to send an RSVP to Lyndzie Fifhouse:

to customization, as I welcome the opportunity to discuss them with you. I also welcome your insights into this sometimes tricky area.

- Al Fifhouse

On another note: The phone number for myself is 847-477-7337. This is my cell phone, and so it is almost always with me. As I can find no reason to maintain a land line at my desk, I have opted to take the leap, and go completely wireless. Please remove any and all previous phone numbers you may have from my listing in your address book. And as always, please feel free to email or call me any time.

[Tuesday, 9/16 2 - 3 PM](#)
[Friday, 9/19 10 - 11 AM](#)
[Monday, 9/22 2 - 3 PM](#)
[Thursday, 9/25 10 - 11 AM](#)

MissionBase Training for DS's is scheduled for Friday, 9/12, 2 - 4 PM. Please [contact Lori Smith](#) if interested.



**FROM
THE
BULL
PEN...**



More Addressing Options Available Soon

Last month I reported that the new addressing schema was being "rolled out" to all customers during July. That deployment process is now complete. Many of you have noticed the differences in addressing, and have also reported a couple of bugs which have been fixed. On the whole, however, the rollout went smoothly for all customers. We hope you will find the needed flexibility with the new addressing schema to create more addresses with more uses for the people you serve.

Many of you have had questions about the new addressing schema. We have scheduled on-line training sessions to assist with this. Please refer to the GoToMeeting section of this newsletter.

There are six phases to the entire addressing project. The rollout of the new schema was Phase 5. The last, and final, phase of the project is to bring addressing certification on-line within MissionBase. Address "certification" means that addresses will be certified according to the United States Postal Service (USPS) database and standards. This phase of the project will include:

- **Single address certification.** Whenever an address is edited, or when a new address is created, it will be certified. This feature will be included for all customers. You will also have the option of not certifying a specific address, which allows for specific cases where a non-certified address is necessary.
- **CASS certification with pre-sort.** For larger mailings in which you typically want to take advantage of the USPS standard mailing or other volume mailing discount rates, CASS certification and pre-sort according to USPS standards will be available. This should allow any customer to take advantage of mailing discounts as needed. CASS and pre-sort will be an option within MissionBase, and will be available to those customers who choose to purchase it.
- **NCOA certification.** National Change of Address (NCOA) certification will also be offered. The USPS is changing its regulations, and will require CASS certified mailings to also be certified with the Postal Service's NCOA system. Beginning on November 23, the requirement is that addresses must be run through the NCOA system every 95 days in order to qualify for the lowest rates. We will offer a process that will NCOA-certify active addresses in MissionBase every 85 to 90 days. The NCOA process will also be an option for those customers who choose to purchase it.

The single address certification will begin to rollout to you at the end of August or early September. The CASS certification and pre-sort function will be available to those who choose it, also in late August or early September. The NCOA process will be operational in late September to mid-October. Please contact Al Fifhouse for pricing information on the CASS, presort, and NCOA modules.

Regardless of whether you purchase the additional CASS, presort and NCOA modules, everyone who uses your database will benefit from fewer return mail pieces and the fees that sometimes accompany those returns.

- Bill "Bull" Johnson



**LORI'S
TIPS
&
TRICKS...**

Addressing Changes

Last month I promised some tips for cleaning up your addressing lists following the conversion. As I began to try to put this

together, and have received numerous calls related to addressing, I realized there is a lot more to learn on this new addressing form than I can adequately relate in this article (unless you are looking for a new novel for bedtime reading.) So, instead, we have decided to offer several training sessions on the new Contact Information form (screen) at no cost.

Many times it is clear how to "click around" and find your way through a form, but some changes on this new form may not be so easy to understand. In the scheduled GoToMeetings, (listed elsewhere in this newsletter), Lyndzie and I will demonstrate how to clean up the numerous addresses present, which are duplicated in many instances; how to link and unlink addresses; when to delete an address from the database and when not to; and several other pointers about addresses, phones, and emails. We will also try to answer any questions and concerns that you, our users, might have about the new contact information form.

Primary Key error

I would also like to make you aware of a recent issue you may encounter. Unfortunately, with our latest upgrade in the addressing module we stumbled into a weakness of SQL Server regarding synchronized tables. Shortly after implementation some of you began reporting the following error when entering a new address:

Violation of PRIMARY KEY constraint "PK Addr". Cannot insert duplicate key in object 'Addr'.
(ContactInfo.PutAddr; System Error= -2147217873)

After some late night research, our team figured out what was happening and came up with a fix for this. It only takes a few minutes to resolve, but this must be done through a connection to your computer using our GoToMeeting software. If you do get this error, then please [contact me](#) right away so that I can download and run the fix on your computer. This will get you up and running again quickly, and able to enter new addresses in MissionBase.



JACOB Blogs THE WEB GUY...

The blogging world has been around for quite some time and has significantly grown and evolved over that time. Blogs have always been a nice place to easily share things with others across the Internet, whether you want to share photos, stories about life, or other thoughts and information. More recently I have been noticing the growing wealth of information and knowledge that can be gleaned from blogs.

In the software development world I often find answers to questions and solutions to problems posted on blogs of experts in the concepts I am working with. What I really love is the open dialogue that happens on these blogs and how much I and others, even the blog owner can gain from this type of interaction.

In the near future we will be launching a GSS blog; a place for tips, common issues and answers to frequent questions. As we go through the process of redeveloping our software onto the Adobe platform of products, the blog will be a place where we can post our ideas, demos and samples so that you, our customers, can review them and give us feedback. This will give us the ability to have an open design dialogue and receive ideas from a variety of perspectives, thus helping to make our new product better meet the needs of all those perspectives and provide an excellent user experience.



LYNDZIE'S TECH TALK...

A New Addition...

First I want to express my excitement in joining this wonderful Great Spirit Systems team and the opportunity to work with United Methodist Conferences! I have enjoyed talking with those I have met so far and look forward to the opportunity of meeting the rest of you.

It is with great pleasure that I have the opportunity to announce the addition of WonderDesk, a web-based help desk application for GSS, available in September. This is an excellent alternative to the existing support call structure for MissionBase users and UMCDData.com administration users. WonderDesk will eliminate any guesswork on your behalf in regards to who should receive your questions at GSS. This application will provide you with the ability to select a category relevant to your question, enter a description of the situation, and attach a file.

Please watch for an announcement on or about September 8th for the opening of WonderDesk. In the meantime, here is a brief glimpse of how new support requests will be made.

Add a New Call

Name:	<input type="text" value="Sally Customer"/>
Email:	<input type="text" value="sallycustomer@provider.net"/>
Web Site:	<input type="text" value="http://"/>
Example URL: (if applicable):	<input type="text" value="http://"/>
Category:	<input type="text" value="Find & Edit"/>
Sub Category:	<input type="text" value=""/>
Subject:	<input type="text" value="Add a Person"/>
Description:	<input style="height: 40px;" type="text" value="I need to add a person in MissionBase. Can you help?"/>
Attach File:	<input type="text" value=""/> <input type="button" value="Browse..."/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency: <input type="checkbox"/> This is an emergency	

Category:	--- please select a category ---
ib Category:	--- please select a category ---
Subject:	MissionBase - General
Description:	Find & Edit
	Reports etc.
	Cabinet Module
	Benefits
	Property & Liability Insurance
	Church Remittance
Attach File:	Event Registration
Emergency:	Safe Sanctuaries
	Candidacy
	Statistics
	Synchronization Issues
	New Installation Needed
	UMCData.com
	Other

As with all new programs, we will welcome your comments and suggestions to help us make WonderDesk an excellent support tool for your use of MissionBase and UMCData.com.

Would you like a printable version of this newsletter? You will find it [on our website](#), along with all the archive issues of **The Eagle Eye!**

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