gloo

Website: gloo.us

The short of it: Gloo is a media and communication platform that is specifically tailored for Christian ministries. The most practical use of this company's tools is in the area of texting, but they have a wealth of other resources available for churches, some free, some for purchase.

From their website:" *Gloo is a powerful platform that connects ministry leaders to resources, people, data insights, and funding so their people and communities flourish, and their organizations thrive.*"

Here are some descriptions of their mission on their website:

SERVE THE CHAMPION

Champions are people on the frontlines of growth—the disciplers, counselors, coaches, and mentors. They look to help others along their personal growth journey. We are all champions.

HELP YOU SCALE

Whether you're helping your neighbors, small group members, or multi-site congregation, we're here to help you scale your impact.

POWER YOUR PURPOSES WITH A GREAT PLATFORM

We believe: "Well architected platforms are adopted for self interest, enable collaboration and release the power of the collective." So that's what we've set out to do.

Some Background:

Gloo was founded in 2013 by Scott and Theresa Beck. After scaling successful businesses like Blockbuster Video, Einstein's Bagel, and Boston Market, Scott turned his expertise to helping ministry leaders scale their impact through technology. Seeing the challenges that ministry leaders faced—from lack of access to technology and funding to the need for equipping and connection, Gloo set out to build a trust-based platform that powers every champion's purpose... one person at a time. According to their website, "Gloo Connects the Faith Ecosystem by bringing together people, partners, content, funding opportunities, and more...to help champions change more lives—and ultimately, release their collective might."

How I discovered Gloo:

I had been looking at church texting services for some time. We actually used one for our camo ministry for a year called Mojotxt. We liked that product, but they raised their prices after our first year of using them. We decided to look for a different texting service. I looked at TextInChurch and other similar "church" companies, GroupMe, etc. Nothing seemed like a good fit (and everything cost something, more than what we had been paying).

I finally discovered Gloo when looking through some similar services on Instagram. Gloo advertised as "a free texting service for churches." That caught my interest! I looked more into them and couldn't believe the kind of service they offered for free. I decided to try them out and haven't been disappointed yet. I did want to vet their services, since they have more of an Evangelical background, rather than our Confessional Lutheran. They do have a free version and a paid subscription, which I'll talk about here.

In the following pages, I will explain how Gloo can be used, and how I utilize them. I'll cover:

I.   Messaging (Texting & Email)

II.   The Gloo Marketplace

III. Gloo+

Messaging:

This is by far the biggest perk of using Gloo. **They offer free texting for churches, with a free phone number**. Here are some specifics:

- When I signed up, they gave me an account with a free phone number. They did warn that the number would need around 72 hours to process. Ours was ready to go in about two days.

Our SOTV texting number

- They did ask for an EIN number, to verify that your church is in fact a church.

- The platform that Gloo runs on (app.gloo.us) does take some learning to get used to. For example, their messages are called "*broadcasts*" rather than texts. This label allows for them to not only text but also email members in a broadcast (message) sent to members. I will say that the email function is underwhelming, and a lot of the focus for the tech went into the texting.

  - The easiest way to use Gloo is through a web browser, but they do have a mobile app that works in some limited ways.

- Adding people to the messaging database can be done quickly via integrations with certain services (like Mailchimp) or a CSV file (you can turn any spreadsheet into a csv file). Otherwise, you can submit information for each profile. You can submit First Name, Last Name, Phone Number, Email, and then designate what Group you want that person to be a part of. A person can be part of multiple groups.

  - There is a box that you have to check when you add a person that says "I have permission to text the number I entered." Because I am a pastor and I assume people want me to communicate with them, I always check this box. There is a message at the bottom of this form that does says "*When a person is added to your Gloo account, the first broadcast sent to that person will be automatically amended with a message saying "Sent by ORG NAME. Text STOP to opt-out, SPAM to flag as inappropriate.". This part of the Onboarding Completed message is not editable and is required to comply with federal laws regarding text communication. This will only be sent once*

per person and will use additional credits (1 credit per person)." So if someone wants to opt-out of the message they can. I have had a few people do that. The interesting this is that Gloo enables the administrator to see if the person has opted out. Say you are working with a delinquent. If that person opts out of the messages, that may be a sign that they don't want to talk to you. From a pastoral perspective, that's a good indicator that someone may have an issue that needs to be addressed... why wouldn't they want a text from their church? I suppose some rationale could be given, but I haven't had anyone say they are annoyed yet.

- In terms of support, Gloo has a chat feature on the Gloo website that makes chatting with the techs easy. I've asked them a few things over the past few months, and they are fairly quick to reply. There is a Resources and Help section to dive into for troubleshooting as well.

- One unique thing about Gloo is the inclusion of AI features. Some things are automatic, while others may need to be setup.

  - Automatic features include things like prayer requests. When someone sends a prayer request to the church number, the AI recognizes this and can pass it onto the right person in the church. (Permissions can be set for who gets what on the texting team)

  - There is a "Quick Responses" section that can be set up. In this section, "Gloo uses natural language processing to respond to a person's frequently asked questions. Instead of responding to the same questions over and over, edit each response to save you time! Click a topic below to edit the automated response sent to your people. If someone texts in a question related to a topic that is turned off, the message will get marked as unresolved for you to reply to in Messages." So some things have to be customized. Keep in mind, these features can also be turned off (we don't have most of ours on). See the next page for what "Quick Responses" look like.

Quick Responses

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General Information ⦿

*This is **Account Name** automated texting system. For more info, text us here, contact us at email address, or visit our website link.*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Social Media ⦿

*"Follow us on Instagram: **instagram**, find us on Facebook: **facebook**"*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Giving ⦿

*"You can give online **link** or in the offering bins located **placement**."*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Service Times ⦿

*"Join us in person or online **service times**."*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Service Locations ⦿

*"You can join online **link** or in person at **address**."*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Sermon Archive ⦿

*"Find past messages **link**"*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Worship Media ⦿

*"Listen in to our worship playlist **link**"*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Church doctrine ⦿

*"Learn more about what we believe **link**."*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

Church Website ⦿

*"Check out our website **link**."*

➕ Add Effect

0 Interactions

- There's a lot that could still be explored and highlighted that Gloo has, but one I definitely want to highlight is workflow. You've probably seen something like this before:
    - "Text WORD to PHONE NUMBER and get signed up for more information
- Gloo gives this option to churches, and there are 3 workflows to set up with the free account. The Gloo+ account has unlimited workflows available. Think about this for young new people in your church. This can be a quick way to sign people up for BIC classes, sign people up for events, etc.
    - An example: we have "baptize" as a word that people can text in to schedule a baptism. If they text "baptize" to us, our Gloo service sends back a Google Form link for signing up for a baptism.
    - Another example: through a supplied template from Gloo, a church can have people send up for an Advent Calendar that you receive through texting. Each day, you receive a bible passage that helps lead up to Christ's birth. Neat thought!

The Gloo Marketplace:

Through partnerships with stores and vendors like Outreach.com, Children's Ministry Deals, Shift Worship, and many more, Gloo offers a variety of physical and digital products available for purchase in a digital Marketplace (accessible via your normal Gloo page). You'll find products for teaching pastors, kid's ministry leaders, worship leaders, and more, as well as products like banners. In my experience, there's a wealth of material that can give pastors a lot of ideas for ministry in worship, evangelism, even pastor taxes. There are short E-books that offer advice on how to use Gloo and similar companies for your church tech. The Marketplace section also has message templates available for you to use to in your texting to your members. I haven't looked at everything in the marketplace but there's a lot to sift through.

- A note: much of what Gloo offers material-wise probably is more designed for nondenominational or evangelical churches. The material will need to be vetted and edited if a WELS pastor wishes to use it. Use wisely!

Gloo+ ($49/month)

Gloo offers a free version or a paid version. The following explains the differences according to Gloo:

- The Gloo free account includes these perks:
  - 10,000 text messages/month
  - 3 groups that you can organize your contacts into (think Youth Group, College Ministry, Prospects, etc.)
  - 3 Workflows and menus
  - Some integration
- The Gloo + account includes these perks:
  - 15,000 text messages/month
  - Unlimited groups that you can organize your contacts into
  - Unlimited Workflows and menus
  - Unlimited live polls
  - 3 Subaccounts
  - Some integration, specifically some ChMS Integration
  - Direct Mail to New Movers
  - Explorer Connections
  - Sermon Kits for Outreach
  - Marketplace Discounts

A comparison chart of Gloo's free version with Gloo+:

	Gloo Free	Gloo+
Text Messaging on a dedicated phone number	10k/month	15k/month
Groups	3	Unlimited
Workflows	3	Unlimited
Menus	--	✓
Polls	--	✓
Subaccounts	--	3
New Mover Program	--	✓
Explorers	--	✓
Sermon Kits	--	✓
Exclusive Marketplace Discounts	--	✓

Gloo's stats as of September 2024:

Our Platform

More than 70,000 churches use Gloo to connect.

1,500
Free Resources

370 k
New People Connected to Church

12.5 M
Text Messages

Warning!

If you plan on utilizing Gloo in your WELS church, a few things need to be kept in mind:

- This is not a company run by WELS people or pastors, so don't expect to encounter the best theology. Here's an example of how this can be dangerous:

    - I was exploring the templates for texting that could be used. One of them was on how to set up a workflow for baptism sign ups. The template that could be used/copied, included language that taught decision theology. Yikes! A simple copy and paste could have misled my people and given me a lot of trouble!

- Another thing to keep in mind is that this tech tool has a learning curve to it. I consider myself tech-savvy, but it took me some time to get used to it. A pastor/tech worker should vet it for themselves over an initial time period before going all out in using it.

    - The example I gave above of the decision theology sneaking in would be one example of how a pastor or worker needs to be prepared to watch out for that stuff. If the pastor himself isn't tech friendly, he may need to find someone who is if he really wants to pursue using it. Even then, attention to detail matters!

- In general, you'd want to know why and how you would use the texting service before you sign up. If you say, "I'll use it every now and then" you may underutilizing it. If you say "I'll text my members every day" you may actually be hurting your ability to message since people would be annoyed! The point being, texting can work for churches, but there's probably a sweet spot for each situation.

An Explanation of the 10,000 Credits

<u>From a Gloo rep I messaged with:</u> *Message credits are used for all outgoing texts. With a free Gloo account, you have access to 10,000 credits a month for free!*

With Gloo, you can send messages that contain text and/or emojis (SMS), as well as messages that contain pictures and other media (MMS). Because of the difference in how these messages are configured and sent, credit usage varies slightly between these 2 types.

Because the texting industry as a whole counts SMS messages as something called "segments", Gloo counts segments the same way. In Gloo, one SMS segment = one credit. Remember, SMS messages are text messages that contain only text and/or emojis (no media or pictures). Basically, when sending an SMS message over 160 characters, the message gets split into segments of 153 characters. A recipient's device shows the text as one message even though there are multiple segments.

If there are no emojis present in your text message, use this chart for character count:

> *- An SMS (text) message of up to 160 characters = 1 credit*

> *- An SMS (text) message of 160-306 characters = 2 credits*

> *- An SMS (text) message of 307+ characters = 3 credits*

> *- An MMS (media) message of any length = 3 credits*

So, the maximum number of credits that will be spent for any message you send on Gloo is 3. From a technical side, emojis change the way a message is sent and how the segments work. If there are one or more emojis present in any of the text, use this chart for character count:

> *- Up to 70 characters = 1 credit*

> *- 71 to 134 characters = 2 credits*

> *- 135+ characters = 3 credits*

Thanks!

I'd be happy to answer questions about Gloo. I'll supply my contact info below just in case somebody has a question.

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