

Beautifully Easy Church Websites



Even you can make one!

People find churches online

Anecdotally, people find your church...

Having driven by it for years, they finally decide to
come inside

Heard good things about it from others

Because you have a website

Your website communicates
something about your church

(It can be good or bad)

Your website is communicating to your visitors through...

Music (God forbid)

Speed

Color Schemes

Images

Layout/Design

Tone

Embedded Music

In the mid-1990's, someone discovered that it was possible to embed sound files into web pages.

Ever since that time, church communicators have offered continuous prayers of atonement for this sin.

Just because you can doesn't mean that you should.

Speed

100 milliseconds (Blink of an eye): your page will feel instantaneous to visitors

400 milliseconds: A good, fast page

1 second: Acceptably fast, your site will feel responsive

4 seconds: 25% of visitors will leave your site

5 seconds: 75% of mobile visitors will abandon your site

10 seconds: Visitors give up—irritation is high enough that most

Color

A good color scheme can unify your website with printed materials and other electronic communications

Color can help visitors understand where they are on the site

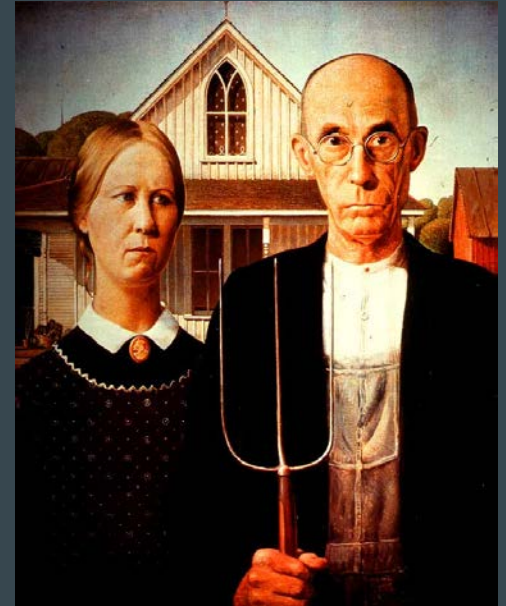
Your color scheme can communicate something about your community

Images – Things to Avoid

(Most) Pictures of your building/stained glass

Pictures of your empty sanctuary
Poorly lit pictures that look yellow

The American Gothic pose



Images – Leader/Portraiture

Subject is the focus, in the foreground, & draws the eye

A slight angle lends emotional impact



Images – Still Life & Landscapes

Adds interest when used properly & sparingly

Can highlight a concept/project/opportunity



Images – Photojournalistic

Tells a story, should include action

Offers a thought-provoking point of view



Layout/ Design

A clean and orderly design and well-thought out menus are essential for navigating your site

White space is okay. It helps your page “breathe.”

Avoid having the viewer scroll too much.

Make sure all the similar pages on your site use the same design.

Tone

Use friendly and inviting language on your website.

“Welcome” is the the most important emotion to convey.

If you have a “statement of belief” on your page, make sure it doesn’t feel punitive. Make it inspirational and aspirational instead.

Content

Share about your church's life without *oversharing* about your church's life. The website is the appetizer for a potential newcomer, not the main course.

Avoid pages that are just massive blocks of text. Use images!

Think about how you allocate your content across your different pages!

The Words on the Page

Be consistent across your website with usage, grammar, capitalization, etc.

Don't use "insider" words unless you define them; i.e.

"Eucharist" (say "worship service" or "Holy Communion" instead.)

"Narthex"

"John Smith Hall" (just say "parish hall")

More Pitfalls to Avoid

And...you know...how to avoid them.

Unintuitive or Unprofessional URL

- NO!

- www.geocities.com/sites/19970601/stswithinsintheswamp/
- www.churchontherock.org
- www.sttims1835.org

- YES!

- www.stmarksmystic.org

Fully Justified Text

- We know it looks nice. But it is much harder to read the left justified text. The reason that published books use full justification and still read well is that people are paid to set the text just so. Please don't fully justify your website.
- Instead, use left justification. Yes, there will be a "ragged" margin to the right. But people are used to that and won't even notice it. And look! All the words are the same space apart. Stick with left justification. Or justification by faith.

Images that Take Forever to Load

- We've all waited as a picture spent an excruciating thirty seconds "printing" on screen.
- This is because the original file is massive, even if the space it's taking up is not.
- Instead, before uploading a picture, resize it in Preview (Mac) or a picture editor (PC) before loading it.
- Images that are the exact size for the space allotted are the best!

Where's your church located?

- Some church websites treat the location of the church as a closely guarded secret.
- The number one thing a website needs is directions to the building (or an interactive map...or both.)
- Put this in multiple, intuitive places, preferably at least once on the main page.

The Dreaded Blank (or out of date) Calendar

- If the calendar on your website is empty, visitors will assume nothing happens at your church.
- You can embed a Google calendar into your site, which you can update from your phone.
- That way, parishioners can be confident that the calendar is always accurate.

This Page is Incomplete...

- If you aren't ready to share a certain page with the world, just don't publish it. You can keep it as a draft until you're ready.
- Or you can publish a provisional page with a captivating image and a single line of text.

Unreadable Color Scheme

- Don't do this. This is not cool or edgy. It's just hard to read.
- Do this. There's a reason that books have white pages and black text and have since Gutenberg.

Takeaways

Church websites are the primary point of contact for new members and people searching for churches.

Your website is *already* communicating something about your church. It could be positive or negative.

Be conscious of the emotional impact of your website. It is what will attract or turn away people to your community.

The goal is that your website reflects as accurately as possible the life of your church & the nature of your community.

Starting a Website: Checklist

Secure a Domain Name

- If you use Wordpress, you can do this during the sign-up process.
- If you already have a domain name (and it's a good one), you can “map” it later.
- If you already have a domain name (and it's a bad one), sign up for a new one with Wordpress, then forward the old site to the new one for a while.

Identify a Web Host

- If you use Wordpress, that's taken care of.
- If not, there are a million, and they'll walk you through setting up the hosting.

Create a Sitemap

- This is a flowchart of all the pages on your site and how they connect to each other. This will also serve as your checklist as you build the site.
- Example (It doesn't need to look this official; scrawls on a legal pad is just fine.)

Create a Style Guide

A style guide tells you the standard for:

Color

Typeface

Size of Headers, Body Text, etc.

Dimensions of Images

Proper Word Count

Create Your Content

Be conscious of word count and word choice.

Know to whom you are speaking.

Most content will be for visitors; some will be for parishioners.

Have a Photoshoot

Most candid pictures from church are of people eating at a potluck. Don't use those.

Make sure all your images tell the story of your church.

It's okay to have an image of the building on the directions page.

Get Approval

Someone needs to sign off before the site goes live.

Rector

Vestry

Communications committee

Launch Your Site!

Do a soft launch first for a few folks, and ask them to poke around, clicking all the links to make sure they work, etc.

Then launch it fully. Ask your parishioners to link to it via social media.