

## Guidelines for Congregational Websites

### Diocese of Fond du Lac, the Episcopal Church in northeast Wisconsin



Congregational websites have two audiences: the general public (looking to visit a church for a Sunday or find a church home) and church members (looking for “inside” information, like serving schedules). Church sites need to be for the public first, members second. Public information is to be at the top level (for example, menu bar) with member information at lower levels (for example, sub-menus). These guidelines are for church sites.

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**Priority #1** are things every site NEEDS to have or include which tend to be the same over time, and only need occasional refreshing. If not present, they should be added as soon as possible.

- Design** simple, clean, uncluttered - less is often more. Simplify language, use simple fonts, make content skimable, use whitespace, use headers to break up text.
- Code that is **dynamic**, adjusts to any screen size: desktops, tablets or mobile phones.
- Physical location **address** of the congregation, linked to a map.
- Directions for **parking**, especially if quirky or not obvious from the street.
- Phone number** normally answered during business hours. Remember area code.
- Email address** normally checked within one business day.
- Listing of current **service times** with day of week, a.m. or p.m., and visible on the front page.
- A brief **description** of each service. Music or congregational singing? Traditional or contemporary? Episcopal Eucharist of Rite I or Rite II?
- Indication if a **nursery** is available and times available.
- Description of **gathering opportunities** around service times. Is there a Sunday School or Christian Formation? For children or adults? Coffee Hour?
- Use of **language** which mentions God, Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit, that identifies a Christian church, and not just a community organization.
- Recent **photos** (preferably no more than a year old) that show people in the place. Each page should have one photo that relates to the page’s content. Photos must be appropriately sized for internet to allow faster loading (preferably less than 1MB, never more than 5 MB).
- Links** to the diocese ([diofdl.org](http://diofdl.org)) and Episcopal Church ([episcopalchurch.org](http://episcopalchurch.org)).
- Search** feature or box in your header so it appears on every page.

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**Priority #2** are the things a site MAY WANT but tend to need refreshing more often than #1, and need regular maintenance. If not present, a congregation should be clear who will keep things up before adding them to the site.

- How to join.** Explain process for becoming a member of the congregation.
- Calendar** of events beyond listing of services. Many congregations embed a Google Calendar to offer this.
- Social media** integration. A simple link to full-fledged embedding of posts.
- Images** of clergy, lay employees and leaders. Include name and title of each person. If email links, should be to church email address, and not personal email address. Best practice to not include emails to anyone not on the staff.
- Community engagement.** Link to local organizations or activities which the church has an official connection.

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**Priority #3** are the things a site MAY WANT to include but will require some technical expertise to implement and coordination with individuals outside the site. They tend to need refreshing more often than #1 and need regular maintenance. If not present, a congregation should be clear who will keep things up before adding them to the site.

- Ministry area** descriptions and details, contacts.
- Online donations.** Work with a secure financial service (for example, PayPal) to set up. May be used to receive special gifts or regular pledges. Might be a service charge (usually percentage of payment). Vestry approval highly recommended before implementing.
- Sermons** and sermon archives. Rarely hosted on the site but uploaded to an online service like YouTube and linked back to or embedded on site. Content should be kept current – but because it is also an archive, not having recent content is not detrimental like other items.
- Content Feeds** from Episcopal News Service, Diocesan News Service, Anglican News Service. Outside content that appears on your site and is current.
- Newsletters.** Links to PDF documents allowing one to click and download. Online viewers may also be available to let people read without downloading.

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### Website Management Practices

Caring for a website requires stewardship like taking care of the facility does. There needs to be a “go-to” person who takes care of problems when they arise and updates regularly. Listed below are some recommend practices to have in place for the church website.

- Maintain secure list of site items including **usernames, passwords,** and services linked. At a minimum, registration information for URL (churchname.org) and whatever site platform you use (weebly.com). It may include Google accounts, etc... Kept in church office and the “go-to” person.
- Have a named webmaster/sexton/steward who is **primary** person responsible for the site.
- Have a named **back-up** webmaster/sexton/steward with basic knowledge of access to site.
- Avoid posting content you wouldn’t stand up and share during **announcements** at church. If you have doubts, don’t post it.
- Make site content available using an Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike **Creative Commons License.** Visit [creativecommons.org/licenses](http://creativecommons.org/licenses) for details.
- Do not place copyrighted material on the site you do not have specific **permission** to use. Note –a lot of content that is copyrighted may be available to use because of a Creative Commons License.
- Post photos only taken in a **public setting** or you have permission of those in the image (note: the Holy Eucharist is open to the public, so these are safe photos).
- When posting images of people, **avoid identifying** by name. The exception is clergy and lay employees doing their duties in the image.

### Summary

By using priority areas as a checklist and following best practices, a church website may effectively provide information to the general public and members. The Diocesan Office can help make it the best it can be and is interested in helping and committed to providing answers or helping to find solutions. For additional assistance or information, contact Matthew Payne at the Diocesan Office at [mpayne@diofdl.org](mailto:mpayne@diofdl.org) or (920) 830-8866.