

**Guidelines for Congregational Websites
of the Diocese of Fond du Lac
The Episcopal Church in northeast Wisconsin**



Congregational websites have two primary audiences. The first is the general public, specifically those looking to visit a church for a Sunday or find a church home. The second are church members looking for more detailed “inside” information, such as serving schedules or abuse prevention training links. These websites need to be presented for the public first, and members second. So public information should be at the top level of a site (for example, the menu bar), and member information at lower levels (for example, sub-menus).

The diocesan Website Team has developed the following guidelines to be implemented for congregational websites in the Diocese of Fond du Lac.

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

- Design** that is simple, clean, uncluttered. Less, is often more. Simplify language, use simple fonts, make content skimable, use whitespace, use headers to break up text.
- Design that is **dynamic**, it 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 it is quirky or not obvious from the street.
- Phone number** that is normally answered during business hours. Remember the 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** that mentions God, Jesus 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 webpage 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) and Episcopal Church (episcopalchurch.org).
- Search** feature or box in your header so it appears on every page.

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

- How to join.** Explain the process for becoming a member of the congregation.
- Calendar** of events that are beyond the listing of services. Many congregations embed a Google Calendar to offer this.
- Social media** integration. This may be from the simple link to full-fledged embedding of posts.
- Images** of clergy, lay employees and leaders. This should include the name and title of each person. If email links, should be made only to church email addresses and not personal email addresses. It is 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.

Priority #3 are the things a website MAY WANT to include but will require some technical expertise to implement and require coordination with individuals outside of the website. They tend to need refreshing more often than Priority #1 and need regular maintenance. If these are 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.** Need to work with a secure financial service, such as PayPal, to set up this option. May be used to receive special gifts or regular pledges. There is a service charge (usually a percentage of the payment). Vestry approval is highly recommended before pursuing this option.
- Sermons** and sermon archives. Rarely hosted on the site, but uploaded to an online service like YouTube and then linked back to or embeded on the site. Content should be kept current, however because it is also an archive, failure to have recent content is not as detrimental as it can be for 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.

Website Management Practices

Taking care of a website requires the same type of stewardship that taking care of the facility does. Like for the building, 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 congregational website.

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

Summary

By using the priority areas as a checklist and following the practices above, a congregational website should be able to effectively provide information to the general public and members of the church. The diocesan Website Team is assigning a Helper to each congregation who is available to consult with the congregation to see that their website can be the best it can be. These are folks who are not experts, but instead 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 or (920) 830-8866.