

12 ideas for your church website

© Good News Web Designers Association

<http://gnwda.org>

#1: Use the website to connect parishioners with the pastor and staff through special messages or sermons/homilies. Tie the messages into holidays, parish issues, etc. This can be an easy way for church members to get to know their pastor or deacon or religious educator and learn of their views on ethical and timely issues. Don't be afraid to tackle even the most disturbing topics; if the people are talking about it, the leadership needs to address it.

#2: Give each parish office and ministry their section of the website as a place to distribute their resources, post notices of events, and answer any questions that people would normally phone the office or ministry about. Make a separate "folder" (directory) for each office and ministry, for example:

www.mychurch.org/parishcouncil/

#3: Post the church directory and update it continually as a source of accurate, dependable information.

#4: Keep an up-to-date calendar of parish events online. Use photos and other graphics to add eye-appeal.

#5: List special events taking place outside the parish, such as conferences, retreats, concerts, Pro-Life marches, etc., with hyper-links to the websites of the sponsors of the events. Your webpages could include biographical information on the speakers, directions to the event, registration information, etc.

#6: Promote all fundraisers with excitement and make it interesting enough so that parishioners will want to look at it. People don't like being asked to donate more money, so they won't look at webpages on fundraisers unless they perceive there will be some benefit for themselves. Put a Treasure Hunt or Contest or some other enticement on these pages.

#7: Include the parish Mission Statement, the history of the parish, and related photos.

#8: Make sure the website is helpful to individuals as well as parish ministries. What do people on both sides of the church office door want more information about? Offer the information that website visitors seek.

#9: Make the site interactive to give visitors a greater interest level as well as reasons to repeatedly return to this site. Give them something to do other than look up information.

#10: Make all webpages user-friendly and easy to navigate. Limit the use of graphics, animation and JavaScripts so that the pages are quick-loading. Avoid features that require website visitors to have the latest and "greatest" downloaded software, because most people are using computers that have not caught up with everything that is now available. Many are afraid or unwilling to download a program just to make your site work.

#11: Turn the website into a resource where the non-church members can go to find accurate and helpful information about your faith, the parish, and the Church's stand on ethical and timely issues.

#12: Provide articles, scriptures, original photos and artwork, questions and answers about the faith, and other material for the sake of inspiring the website visitors and encouraging spiritual growth. This can also become a resource for the leaders of ministries to use in their evangelization efforts.

EXTRA TIPS

- Websites are inexpensive enough to warrant a church or ministry getting its own URL. You shouldn't need to spend more than \$20 per month. A great hosting service is <http://eHost4u.com>.
- When choosing a URL for a new website, imagine a parishioner has forgotten the address and is guessing what it is. What would he try? Keep it simple and easy to guess.
- Assign space on the home page for an eye-grabbing announcement that changes often, promoting whatever page on the website is most important at that time, be it an upcoming parish picnic, or a legislative alert that you want people to call their Senators about, or the newest addition to the website.
- Remember that the primary reason to have a website is for ministry. How does the church or organization typically minister to people? Do it on the website, too!
- Develop a survey to put online and in the church bulletin to find out what the people would consider interesting and what needs they have that they want the website to meet. Post the survey results online for everyone to see and advertise this.
- Get a free post card service for your website, and create cards using pictures of your church or special events. Every recipient of a card becomes a potential new visitor!