
PARISH WEBSITE BEST PRACTICES

Principle: Having an effective website will ensure you stay connected with your parishioners and help them be more proactive with participation in your parish. It is also the **first impression** for newcomers, people seeking to return to the church and people looking for more information. As each generation embraces the digital world we live in, the Website needs to be viewed as a priority and must be easily navigated. Be sure your website is updated every week!

Remember the three **C's**: **Constantly Changing Content**.

- The majority of traffic to your website is to find Mass times, directions and the Parish Bulletin
- Frequent visitors like to see updated/new content
- Professional and easy to read sites are visited more often

3 click rule – keep the number of clicks to a maximum of 3 for a user to find something on your website. Too many submenu clicks can cause someone to stop searching.

STRATEGIES:

HOW TO GET STARTED TO SET UP YOUR WEBSITE:

1. **Use a professional web designer or company** (Our Sunday Visitor, eCatholic, Diocesan Publications, for example). These designers provide a Content Management System (CMS) making it easier for you to manage and update! They offer easy templates that take the technical know-how out of making a great website.
2. As a non-profit, purchase the .org domain. You may be entitled to discounts.
3. Use a short, memorable and identifiable domain name – avoid dashes in the name.
4. Make sure your website is 'mobile responsive' for optimal viewing on all devices (phone, tablet).
5. Recommended not to use a volunteer to build or design, but okay for them to update or manage content.

MANAGING YOUR WEBSITE:

1. A Parish Staff member should be responsible for ensuring site and content is maintained and updated on a regular basis.
2. Make the Parish Website a regular parish staff meeting agenda item.
3. Form a Technology Committee (above parish staff person would be a member).
4. Keep content current and remove old content
 - a. Assign a staff member or volunteer who has the responsibility to update at least one area of the website
 - b. Proofread and test all links when adding to a page
 - c. Update as needed **but** at least once a week
 - d. Set a reminder on your calendar to remove events when they are over
 - e. Suggest to the Parish staff to have the parish website as their home page when they are logged into the internet – as a reminder to keep it updated

ESSENTIAL CONTENT FOR YOUR WEBSITE:

What do you want your website to convey to parishioners and visitors? Is your parish mission well represented in your website? Critical content should be clearly placed on the home page, or linked clearly on the home page and choose an easily readable font.

Minimally, you should incorporate the following content items on your home page or at least have the information available that is obvious when your home page is opened up.

1. Welcome Message
2. Mass times/Holiday Schedules/Special seasonal parish events
3. Address/Directions to Parish
4. Contact Information – (email address and phone number)
5. Giving/Donate Tab with drop downs for Parish Stewardship, Annual Catholic Appeal and Special Collections, etc –Use a donate button on the **Home Page** of the current ‘campaign’ going on in the parish
6. Sacrament information and contacts
7. New to the Parish/New to Catholic Faith

Other content to consider:

1. Photo Gallery* – of parish people, events, etc – avoid photos of just buildings
2. Weekly Calendar (What’s happening this week)
3. Stewardship Tab
4. Other Links: (could be in the form of drop down menus within a tab)
 - a. Parish Registration form
 - b. Parish Staff info*
 - c. Weekly bulletin*
 - d. Pastor’s Homily
 - e. Faith Formation schedule
 - f. Parish Ministries*
 - g. Celebration of newly baptized, new parishioners, marriages, other*
 - h. Other Catholic websites (i.e., Vatican, USCCB, Archdiocese)

* Photos and names you put on the website need to have the consent of those persons – the Archdiocese has restrictions and requirements regarding consent. Make sure parishioners sign a hard copy release or parish provides a link to a consent form on their website. In addition, all images need to be free of copyright or used with the permission of the website they came from.

SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION ON YOUR WEBSITE:

Does your website connect and allow people to encounter liturgies, evangelization and the social aspects of your parish? Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the most popular platforms used today. If you don't have accounts created for your parish already, we suggest starting with Facebook this year. Once you have your social media profiles setup, the most basic integration you can do is placing the profile links on your website (some companies have the integration built-in). This will eventually lead your users to following your respective pages, and then join the conversation. Social media can be used as an important part of online evangelization when used correctly. It has the power to reach an audience that we've never thought imaginable!

THINGS TO AVOID ON YOUR WEBSITE:

Background music -- Site limited to one particular type of browser -- Busy backgrounds, clutter