

CREATING A WELCOMING

PARISH WEBSITE





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We live in a chaotic world. People no longer have hours to devote to research and comparison shopping for cars, much less a Catholic church. These days, we have lots of choices when it comes to deciding which parish to attend. Nine times out of 10, potential visitors will check out your parish website before they walk into your place of worship for Mass. From there, they should be able to get a sense of the kind of parish community they can expect to experience. This is why a clean, easy-to-navigate website is so important when it comes to attracting new members and engaging current ones.

It's easy to convey a welcoming environment by following a couple of best practices. Here are a few tips to check out when it comes to creating and maintaining your vibrant parish website.

START WITH THE BASICS

Think of your website as the front porch of your parish. The goal is to make it as inviting and unassuming as possible, so that others will be compelled to take that first step into your church. And while you'll certainly get people from all walks of life, you'll want to focus on the average Catholic. As with any website, you need a clear opening, and a welcoming message which speaks to the heart.

Think of your visitors when writing your greeting — who do you want to speak to? Some will come to your website on fire for the faith, while others may be coming back to church after years of being away. Still others may be visiting your website just because they're looking for a new place to worship. Whoever they are, be sure to greet them as Jesus would — with love and acceptance — by conveying warmth, inclusivity, and discipleship rolled into one cohesive message. **A couple examples we've seen:**

- “We’re Glad You’re Here. How Can We Help?”
- “Welcome to St. Matthew Parish! We’re here for you.”
- “Looking to Get Involved in Parish Life? Join Us!”
- “Join us on Sundays at the Table of the Lord.”

WHEN DESIGN IS KEY

Website design is pretty important these days. Just as important as words, so, too, are the images and the design that conveys who your faith community is. Avoiding clutter is good practice not only in the home and office, but on your website, too. Don't be afraid of white space (you don't need to fill every inch of your homepage with information), and if there is room in the budget, consider hiring a professional photographer to take photos at your next Mass that you can use to show potential members exactly *who* makes up your thriving congregation.

While it's been common practice, more and more parishes are moving away from showcasing the parish building, and instead choosing to feature parishioners in action. Whether that be at a fun festival, during Mass, restocking the food pantry, or familiar faces at the annual pet blessing, it's much more engaging and eye-catching than using a stagnant building photo.

When choosing images, remember — they should be at a correct resolution, not pixilated or distorted, and should match the demographics of your community. If your parish is made up largely of young families, it would make sense to use images of, well, young families. Design, too, should be clean and inviting.

WRITE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Years ago, your website was the central hub for all things parish related. It was where both your outside audience and internal staff came to find necessary information. But times have changed. With the wide-spread use of email, instant messaging, and texting, there are much more effective ways to communicate with parish staff and ministry volunteers. So, think of your website as your public facing communication tool — today, your website should be geared towards the visitor, often called “seekers.”

That being said, avoid church jargon as much as possible. Parish staff understands what “faith formation” means, but to the average person checking out your website, terms like that can sound pretty daunting. Try using simple words that can be expanded upon if they wish to learn more. For example, try using “cultivate” to direct people to the various ways they can grow in the faith — through the sacraments, small group Bible studies, and prayer. Or instead of using the word “register,” find warmer words such as “belong” or “join.” Connotation is super important here! For someone searching for a parish, it's better to make things simpler and not overcomplicate it with a \$10 word when a nickel word would suffice.

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BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

It's no secret that some parish websites try to have it all. Whether that be an extensive listing of all their ministries, a weekly blog from the pastor, youth minister, and pastoral associate, hundreds of photos from the latest parish picnic, or even entire web pages devoted to the history of the Catholic Church, some parishes believe that the more they have to offer, the better it is for the end user. However, this isn't the case any longer. You don't need an intricate website that has everything. In fact, the easier it is to navigate, the better!

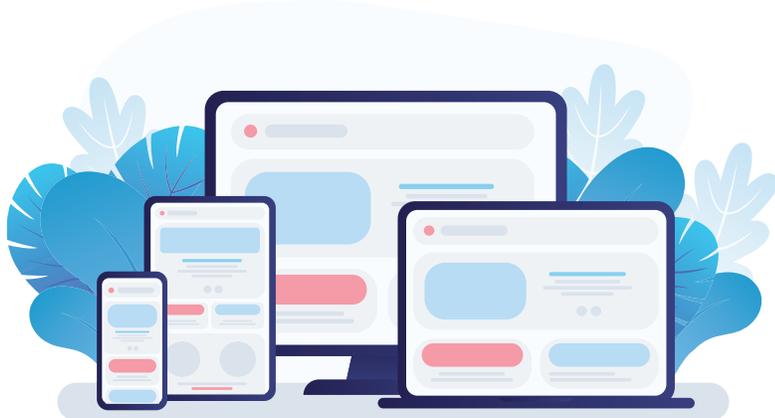
According to a survey by the Nielson Norman Group, the typical internet visitor spends 59 seconds on a website. This means that you have less than one minute to capture their interest before they move on. What do you want them to know? For parish websites, the church address, Mass and Confession times, and an invitation to attend on Sunday is key — everything else is just gravy.

Ready to make the leap into a more impactful web presence? We can help! Our WeConnect website builder offers beautiful drag and drop templates, photo galleries, forms and more that will inspire potential members to visit your community. Connect with us today for a demo!

<https://4lpi.com/solutions/catholic-church-websites>

PRO-TIP

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01-15-158-21v1



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