



# Websites for Churches

Updated 23 January 2023

## Why your church needs a website

Your church website is a means of communicating with your community, and like a shop window where the wider public can find out about your faith and your community, discover useful information, contact you, and then perhaps join you.

Since COVID, websites and other online services have been vital channels of communication and support. The internet has become an integral part of our society, and there is an expectation that information from all kinds of organisations can be found online. So churches with good websites appear more attractive and engaging. It is important that any church website is accurate, up-to-date, and provides safeguarding information.

Your website can be used to:

- Provide information 24 hours a day
- Communicate with your members and local community
- Provide info about baptisms, weddings and funerals
- Enable people to visit you and new members to join
- Publicise news, meetings and events
- Raise funds and attract volunteers

- Communicate the Christian faith
- Provide support for those going through difficult times

## Benefit: Connect locally

Archbishop William Temple once said “The church is the only society on earth that exists for the benefit of non-members.”

A good website will enable you to make more people aware of what’s going on in your church: services, events, support you offer, and so on. Then there are linked organisations: the church school (and how to get a place!), other churches in the area, charities you support. In some places it could become an information hub of contacts for local and public services.

You should publish information about your weekly services; major services for Christmas, Easter and harvest; and events of national significance such as Queen Elizabeth’s jubilees, death and funeral.

You can enable website visitors to add events to their electronic calendar, or share them on social media. Set up a mailing list, and

enable people to register via the website to receive your newsletter, event publicity, service sheet, volunteer requests, etc.

People often turn to churches at times of crisis and major life events. You can provide information about what options are available when planning a baptism, wedding or funeral; clear information about what to expect; and related contact details.

In the case of weddings, be aware that you may be competing with other venues. Be real, but also help couples to imagine themselves in your church. Provide good quality photos inside and out, ideas for readings and music, and include some happy testimonials. You could forge relationships with local reception venues, caterers and photographers, and provide their contact details too... not forgetting your own musicians.

Similarly, provide practical information about what to do in the face of death, with contact details for local undertakers, crematoria and burial grounds.

If you hire out the church or church hall for concerts or to the local community, provide all the information a prospective user needs to know about your offering, and again contact details.

The website could enable your congregations and the wider local community to ask questions and provide feedback, either through an online form or via discussion forums. Feedback forms are more direct and private. Discussion forums are interactive and open to the whole community.

Websites can also host surveys of the opinions of local people: what they really need, and how the church could help.

## Benefit: Connect with the wider world

Consider how the website fits with your social media and other digital content. For example, make sure social media is consistent, in practical information and tone. Make sure your visitors can access the site on mobiles as well as desktop computers.

You can livestream services and events on the website, or provide links to current and previous livestreams on e.g. Facebook or YouTube. If you record sermons and talks, you can publish these online too.

Are your online groups just for church members or do you want to open them up to others, perhaps in other time zones? Could you provide content in other languages, e.g. via auto-translation?

And finally (or not – be creative!) you could publish more about the history of your church, building, the local area and its people, and show their glories off to the rest of the world.

## Benefit: Communicate your faith

This can be done directly, through providing information about the Christian faith, or signposts to other websites; or indirectly through the tone and content of the website, and how you present your community, its activities and the support you offer.

You could also provide reflections on scripture, theological and spiritual insight, prayers, a means of submitting prayer requests, and messages of comfort and support that will extend globally.

## Benefit: Connect with your members

As well as a means of sharing public information, your website could include a closed 'members area', which is available to e.g. congregation or committee members for sharing more private information and discussing issues.

This area could be used to

- Publicise committee meetings; invite members to contribute to agendas; approve minutes and agendas; discuss agenda items and other issues
- Provide additional information on issues; allow members to offer personal views and opinions
- Provide ministers' and members' contact details, subject to GDPR regulations
- Distribute draft versions of documents – event posters, news releases, grant applications, etc

## Benefit: Save time and money

A website provides enquirers with 24/7 instant access to information, which could reduce the number of simple questions that are handled personally. Information can be added, edited or deleted instantly, ensuring that it is up-to-date and accurate.

Printed publicity can be reduced in size and people directed to further details on your website, saving printing costs and trees. Event posters can be distributed online for members to print and put up themselves. Documents can be distributed online, again saving printing costs and paper.

The website can also provide helpful links to direct questions to the right public services and other organisations that can help, saving the time of both the enquirer and your church.

## Benefit: Tool for fundraising

The website can enable people to donate to your church there and then, or tell them about other means: standing order, BACS, CHAPS, cheque, Gift Aid, Parish Giving Scheme, etc!

You can encourage people to raise funds via other platforms like JustGiving, and publicise specific appeals: their objectives, fundraising target and progress.

## What should be on your website?

Content needs to be relevant, easily found, accurate and up-to-date. Try to understand your key audiences and focus on what they need and what you want them to (be able to) do.

Recommended key content is:

- A welcome
- Brief introduction to what you are all about
- General contact details, and specific information about who to contact for what
- How to get to the church – address, map, directions, public transport, cycling, parking
- Services and events – dates, times, locations, any changes to these, what to expect, provision for children, etc
- Accessibility – physical access, hearing loops, large print sheets and books, etc

- Safeguarding – handbook, church contacts, helplines and local authority contacts for help with issues, signposted on the homepage
- Baptisms/christenings, weddings and funerals, and maybe confirmations and confessions too
- ‘I am new’ – how to get involved

Other content, in no particular order, could include:

- More about the church: what you believe, your ministries, your style of worship
- About the Christian faith
- The lectionary, scripture readings and prayers for the day
- A blog of spiritual reflections, theology, etc
- A virtual prayer board
- Photos of church life, worth a thousand words
- Church groups
- Section for the PCC and other committees
- Upcoming events, and reports of past events
- Newsletters, and mailing list sign-up
- Service sheets, latest news
- Audio and video of services
- More about who’s who – names, photos, short biogs
- Frequently asked questions (FAQs) for visitors and newcomers
- Volunteer opportunities
- How to donate and fundraise
- Information about the building and history of the church
- Clickable plan, 360° or 3D tours
- Any useful local and church links
- Affiliations or awards, such as Inclusive Church, Eco Church
- Social media links and sharing buttons
- Guest book, discussion forums, feedback form, surveys

## What should NOT be on your website?

Do not publish any images or text without permission or appropriate credit, e.g. copyright content, or photos of children or adults. If anyone complains about any content, remove it immediately and apologise.

Be very careful with personal information and GDPR. Any sensitive information should reside in a ‘members only’ area.

Be aware of what is being said on any discussion forums, and remove anything that is libellous or likely to offend. You may want to approve comments before they are posted.

Jargon – use language that anyone can understand – and internal documents like parish mission statements.

## Managing your website

There are three phases to a website: the initial design and development, maintenance, and promotion.

During the **development**, it can be useful to form a group of interested parties within your organisation. These could help with the brief for the website, and contribute content and images. There should be a clear decision-making process. If you are engaging a web developer, one authorised person should be designated as the contact with the developer, to avoid confusion.

Website **maintenance** includes keeping content on the site up-to-date and creating fresh content. Always check that names, contact details, and service times are correct.

It is vital that you tell your community about your website: its address, and what it covers. There are many ways of **promoting** your website, but the main things to think about are who you want to reach (e.g. potential church members, local people, donors), and how best to reach them.

It is a good idea for the management of your website and social media to be shared by several trusted members of your church. This ensures that there is never too much expectation on one

individual, and provides a back-up if one person moves on. Make sure there is good communication between them, and with the leadership team and any groups and committees.

As your website grows, you may find it helpful to designate responsibility for different areas of the site to relevant individuals. You may decide to have a website or digital group or committee, or to discuss website content as part of your regular meetings.

We hope this is a helpful start.  
Please call on **Websites Ahoy!** if you need any advice.

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Hassle-free website design & development

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