

Web Ministry

Resources for enhancing your congregation's Web site



“

*Showing how God is at work
through our hands via the Internet*

”

Thank you for your commitment to show how God is at work through our hands via the Internet! We hope the ideas and resources on this page assist you in your efforts. If you don't find the help you need on this page, feel free to contact us. See separate resources on [guidelines for using photos of congregation members](#), [social media for congregations](#), and [online giving options](#).

The Basics

Step One: Planning

See the "Getting Started" section below for resources to help you describe your audience, define your purpose, prioritize your needs, inventory your assets, and garner organizational support. Develop a set of web content guidelines that meet the needs of your members for privacy and confidentiality, and also adhere to copyright law.

Step Two: Design Your Site

Define the content you'd like to start with, and design site navigation with growth in mind. Do an inventory of site features (e.g. congregation e-mail devotional, calendar with different views, private chat for youth, photo albums for congregation events, blogs for reports from congregational trips, private congregation directory, etc.). This will help when you approach the next step.

Step Three: Select the Tools and a Host for Your Site

Most people use website management software or a "content management system" to develop and maintain their site. Depending on the software or system you select and the features you've described in step 2, there may be advantages of one web hosting plan over another.

Step Four: Maintain Your Site

Here's the liability with developing a congregation website: If you develop a page and never update it, this can reflect poorly on your congregation. By analyzing how communication flows in your congregation you can develop procedures for getting the latest information and making

sure outdated information is removed. Maintenance also means promoting your site by registering in search engines and publishing your web address everywhere. Don't forget to report your Web address to the ELCA churchwide office, so we can put it in the congregation lookup system. Maintenance also means checking your site for broken links and missing images (most web software has reports for this). Return to step one, step back and review your site periodically.

Getting Started

Congregations and other organizations across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are discovering that the web can be used effectively to support their members, and to reach out to others in their communities and around the world. When people ask for help designing and maintaining their Web pages, we usually advise being specific about the goals they want to accomplish with their site, and having someone with professional design skills assist. Here are some selected resources you may find helpful as you begin planning an effective web ministry:

- [Designing Congregational Web Sites](#)
A helpful guide by Scott Thumma of Hartford Seminary, covers most planning and organizational issues and includes a helpful section on criteria for evaluating congregation Web sites (with sample evaluations), and a survey of congregation webmasters.
- [Web Ministry](#)
A comprehensive resource developed by United Methodist Communications based on web ministry workshops. Includes information on social media.
- [Pew Internet and American Life Project](#)
An ongoing program of research into how the Internet affects our lives.

What to Include: Site Content and Features

Here are some ideas for what to include in your website design:

- The full name, location, mailing address and phone number for your congregation. Make this prominent on the home page and available on every page, and easily accessible through a "Contact Us" link.
- E-mail connection to the pastor or responsible congregation staff member/leader.
- The [ELCA brandmark](#) with a link to the ELCA home page: www.elca.org.
- [ELCA Web feeds](#) provide dynamic content — regularly changing news headlines, prayers, and Bible verses — on your site. This is fresh content you don't have to maintain!
- An e-mail link to your website editor so visitors can report errors or make suggestions.
- Display your congregation's service times prominently.
- A congregation calendar or weekly event listing is a helpful reference for members and a window into congregational life for visitors.

- Features that welcome visitors to the congregation (area map, driving directions, photo of the church, building map, frequently asked questions, nursery information, links to information about the community).
- Links to or content from ELCA.org that is **evangelistic** (devotional materials, prayer request section, messages connecting faith to daily life).
- Descriptions of the ministry areas of your congregation, with contact information for group leaders.
- Staff and volunteer leader profiles and a description of who to go to for what.
- Congregational directory in a password protected area.
- Forms to collect data to support the congregational program and member needs: time and talent survey, professional services directory, Sunday school and vacation Bible school registrations forms.
- Audio or video clips of sermons. Sermon transcripts. Previews of upcoming sermon topics.
- A good way to get additional ideas for content for your site is to browse the sites of other congregations.

Where to Put It: Web Hosting Services

Whether you are using software like [Expression Web](#), [PageBreeze](#), etc., or want to develop and maintain your site using a content management system (where you edit and update Web pages through your browser), you'll need to find a site hosting service. It is possible to set up your own Web server, but that requires a high level of technical expertise, especially regarding Web security. Indexes such as [Webhosting Search](#) and [Tophosts](#) provide ways for you to shop for a Web hosting service. Take your list of features and compare that to the specifications of hosting services in your price range.

Most hosting services will assist with registering your domain (e.g., [www.mychurch.org](#)), or you can go to separate domain registrars like [Network Solutions](#) or [Google Domains](#). Here are a few hosting services to start with:

- [Leiturgia Communications Inc.](#) - uses an open source program that allows you to manage the content and leverage the latest technological advances by using the Web browser for editing of your site. Hosting plans begin at \$15 a month. Leiturgia Communications also offers affordable and streamlined web site development, maintenance, and marketing services that are exclusively tailored to fit the needs and resources of Lutheran churches.
- [Church 360: Unite](#) - a congregation "Intranet" product of particular interest to users of [Church 360: Members](#) church management software. Also supports the display of "public" pages, so it could serve as your primary site host. Marketed and supported by Concordia Publishing House.
- There are a number of companies that offer free hosting for non-profits (e.g. [Dreamhost](#) or [Google Sites](#)). Be sure to examine the hosting agreement. Some may require a site-wide footer advertising the company.
- WordPress is a popular blogging platform and content management system. You can build a site on [www.wordpress.com](#), or install the WordPress open source software ([www.wordpress.org](#)) on servers offered by many hosting companies.

Other Resources

- [Web Style Guide](#), 3rd Ed. Online guide to all aspects of Web site design, usability, style and editorial guidelines. Great place to start.
- [MyChurchEvents.com](#) offers many calendar features for an annual fee.
- Hardware and software [discounts](#) are available for ELCA ministries through CDW, Dell and other computer.
- [TechSoup.org](#) also offers software and hardware discounts and great technology tutorials and a weekly e-letter geared to non-profits.
- [HTML Goodies](#). Sections for software reviews, tutorials, authoring, design and graphics.
- [Audio editing tutorial](#). 9 minute video tutorial on how to use the free Audacity software to edit sermon/podcast audio files.

BLOGS

- [Church Marketing Sucks](#)
Launched by Center for Church Communication in 2004, the blog features news and updates on church marketing, ideas and resources, and a community of church communicators.
- [Writing for the Web](#)
Comments and links about the fast-changing genres of Webwriting by Crawford Kilian
- [Current Issues in Web Usability](#)
Web compilation of Dr. Jakob Nielsen's bi-weekly e-mail columns on Web usability.
- [Church Mag](#)
Exploring the intersection of church and technology.
- [MinistryTech Magazine](#)
Collection of blogs and an online community for people interested in church computing and video.
- [Church Tech Today](#)
Has sections on Church Social Media, Software, Websites, Mobile, A/V, Communication, etc.