Toward 2035: STRENGTHEN INVITATION

Your New Front Door

CREATING A WEBSITE THAT WELCOMES

Your congregation's website is its new front door. Your goal should be to get people to open that door and come in.

Assume everyone interested in your congregation will visit your website before they come in-person. It's your first impression. What impression does it make?

The good news is that a good website is easy to have! It doesn't need to cost much. But this is one case where you do get what you pay for. A cheap, poorly built website sends a message to potential newcomers, and it's not a good one.

Before you start designing your website, think carefully about who it is for. Is it for potential newcomers? Or current members? In most cases, it will probably be for both groups. If so, make it work for newcomers first. People already in your congregation are motivated to find what they need on the site. So make it especially easy for potential newcomers to find the information they need.

This means your home page needs to include the information most valuable to guests. Make it easy to find the following information.

Where you are:

- Your building address and the cross streets it's near.
- The door(s) guests can use to enter your building. A photo of the door(s) might help.

Accessibility:

- Is your building accessible to people with various needs?
- Specifically, are the entrances wheelchair accessible? What about washrooms?
- Are there spaces that are not accessible? Be honest about barriers so people know what to expect and can make good decisions for themselves.
- Is there assistance for those with hearing loss?
- What other accommodations do you have in place so people of differing abilities can participate?

How they can participate:

- The starting time for your worship gathering(s).
- How long they can expect your worship gathering to be. Don't assume people know this; the length can vary from congregation to congregation.
- Do people need to buy tickets to participate? Make reservations? Probably not! But don't expect non-church people to know this. We need tickets and/or reservations for many other things we do. Don't make them guess.

- During worship, will they be asked to do anything?
- What about offerings? Do you expect guests to contribute?
- What should they wear? Guests won't want to stand out. So honestly tell them what the typical participant wears.

For Children

- What is available for children?
- Can children stay with their parents/caregivers throughout the service? Can parents/caregivers also accompany their children to your kids' programming?
- How are children protected? Will they be signed in? Are people working with children screened? Supervised? It's a good idea to have your safeguarding policy posted on your website, with a link on your homepage. This shows that you take the children's safety seriously.

Contact Information:

- Have your contact information (email, phone number) easy to find.
- People might phone your church. So have a good phone message. Does it sound natural and friendly? Does it include basic worship information (service times) and your website address?

Other tips:

- Use your website to show curious people who you are.
- Have a simple, clean design. Less is more.
- Have good quality images. Use photos of real people in your congregation, with their permission. If you use images you find online, make sure you have copyright permission. Many sites offer photos that are legal to use for free or for a small cost.
- Keep your information up to date. For instance, if a website still has information about Christmas services and it's February, it sends the message that your congregation doesn't care about staying up to date.
- Avoid church jargon or explain what it means. For example, we often call our worship times "services." However, non-church people might not know what that term means. So you might call them worship gatherings instead, or something like that.

Great online resources can help you design a good church website. Use them. Make your front door attractive, useful, and easy to walk through.

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This resource is printed on tree-free paper.