Your Church on Social Media

A Workshop at Vestry University 2014

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This document will be posted online at www.dioceseofnewark.org/vestry-university
Resolution D069 – Social Media Challenge, adopted at the 77th General Convention, June 2012: Call on every diocese and congregation to actively engage in social media in current and future forms.

Social media strategy

Before you begin, be clear social media part of your church’s overall communications strategy, and make sure it has the support of clergy, wardens and vestry. Much of the recommended due diligence for church websites also applies to social media (see the appendix at the end of this document).

If your church has a website, ideally it should be the “hub” of your communications efforts. All news and events should be posted there first, and then can be shared on social media or linked elsewhere.

- Audience
  - Who is your audience?
  - What social media are they using? (This should help you decide where to focus your efforts.)

- Managers
  - Who in your church can post?
  - Who is editor/manager of message and branding?
  - Do they know how to write for social media? (“Get to the point fast.”)

- Message – What are you trying to say???
  - Modeling the Gospel
  - Letting people see “inside the stained glass”
  - Interacting with members/community

- Other strategy issues
  - Branding – names and logos (below)
  - Photo permissions for minors (next page)

Branding your social media

If you do use multiple social media, select a unique user name, and one logo or photo of the church, and use it for all of them, for consistent “branding.” The diocese uses:

www.facebook.com/dionewark  www.twitter.com/dionewark  www.youtube.com/user/dionewark

And also includes its logo:
Photo permissions for minors

Protect minors by having a photo permission policy for minors (for website use as well as social media). Examples:

All Diocese of Newark registration forms for youth events include this clause:

*I give my permission for photographs and/or video footage of my child to be used by the Diocese of Newark for promotional purposes (brochures, on diocesan websites, promotional videos, presentations, etc).*

St. George’s, Maplewood allows parents to opt out:

*At St. George’s, photos and/or videos are often taken at the Christmas pageant, Blessing of the Animals, the Easter egg hunt, and other special events in which children participate. These photos and videos may be posted on St. George’s website or Facebook page, used in printed materials, or submitted with press releases to local publications, to illustrate our community for potential visitors. Children are never identified by name.*

*It is St. George’s policy to respect the wishes of parents regarding photos or videos that include their children. Please tell us below if there are any ways you do not wish for photos or videos including your children to be used publicly.*

Consider: only using photos that show the backs of kids’ heads. These can still be very effective.

Example:
Facebook [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
Facebook allows you to place your news and events right in front of followers – which they can then share with *their* friends.

**Facebook Pages** [www.facebook.com/about/pages](http://www.facebook.com/about/pages)
A Facebook page is a good place for churches to start with social media. A Facebook group might also be considered. Churches should *not* set up a personal profile, which is meant for individuals only.

Like a personal profile, Facebook Pages enable public figures, businesses, organizations and other entities to create an authentic and public presence on Facebook.

Unlike a personal profile, Facebook Pages are visible to everyone on the internet by default. Facebook members can connect with these Pages by “liking” them, after which they’ll receive the Page’s updates in their News Feed, and can interact with them.

Use of a unique username ([www.facebook.com/username](http://www.facebook.com/username)) is recommended. Facebook generally requires 25 “likes” before allowing you to create a username for your page, although they occasionally allow with fewer.

**How to set up a Facebook page**
Pages are created through the profile of an individual, who becomes the first page manager.

While logged into your Facebook profile, go to [www.facebook.com/pages/create.php](http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php).
Set Up St. Swithin's in the Swamp

1 Profile Picture  2 About  3 Facebook Web Address

Upload From Computer  Import From Website

Save Photo  Skip

Set Up St. Swithin's in the Swamp

1 Profile Picture  2 About  3 Facebook Web Address

Tip: Add a description and website to improve the ranking of your page in search.

Please provide some basic info about St. Swithin's in the Swamp.

http://stswithins-swamp.org  Add Another Site

Will this Page represent a real organization, school or government?  Yes  No

Visit Help Center  Save Info  Skip

Set Up St. Swithin's in the Swamp

1 Profile Picture  2 About  3 Facebook Web Address

Choose a unique Facebook web address to make it easier for people to find your Page. We’ve made a suggestion below, but you can also choose your own. Once this is set, it can’t be changed.

http://www.facebook.com/StSwithinInTheSwamp

Set Address  Skip
Acquiring followers

To work, a Facebook page needs a lot of people who pay attention to it.

Besides inviting friends through Facebook, it needs to be promoted in every way possible outside of Facebook: on your website, bulletins, e-newsletters, even email signatures.

Feel free to download and use the Facebook icon at the top of www.dioceseofnewark.org.

Example email signature with links:

Nina Nicholson
Director of Communications & Technology
The Episcopal Diocese of Newark
973-430-9907
http://dioceseofnewark.org
http://facebook.com/dionewark
http://twitter.com/dionewark
Maintaining your Facebook page

It helps to have multiple Facebook-savvy people as managers or content creators.

Suggestions of what to post:

- Photos, with a short caption (*Make sure you have permission! More on this below.*)
- Videos (*ditto*)
- Announcements
- Event reminders, a couple days before
- e-Newsletters (*If you’re using Constant Contact, it can be set to automatically post your e-newsletter on your Facebook page.*)
- Sermons
- Online articles about your church (Patch.com, etc.)
- Online articles or blog posts about your community, or issues important to your congregation
- News items from the diocese or The Episcopal Church, or other Episcopal groups. *See attached list of Suggested Facebook pages to follow.*
- If you have an active youth group, consider asking the youth leader to get older teens involved in generating ideas for the Facebook page (with supervision).
Safe use of Facebook
Monitor your page for inappropriate content. Use email notifications to track posts.

Decide if followers can post.
Facebook “Insights”

Page Insights is a helpful tool for analyzing when and why your page is visited, to help you optimize your posts.
Suggested Facebook pages to follow (Episcopal or related)

Be both a good Episcopalian and a good Facebook “netizen” by following other Episcopal-related pages and sharing their posts. Here are some suggestions:

www.facebook.com/dionewark
www.facebook.com/episcopalian
www.facebook.com/ecfvp
www.facebook.com/pages/Province-II-of-the-Episcopal-Church/187430714606158
www.facebook.com/pages/Unapologetically-Episcopalian/122364231114060
www.facebook.com/thechurchofengland
www.facebook.com/FriendsOfSSJE
www.facebook.com/IntegrityUSA
www.facebook.com/seamenschurch
www.facebook.com/episcopalyoungadultandcampusministries
www.facebook.com/EpiscoYouth
www.facebook.com/CrossRoadsRetreat
www.facebook.com/forwarddaybyday
www.facebook.com/believeoutloud
www.facebook.com/TheEpiscopalCafe
www.facebook.com/NorthPorch

Some examples of church Facebook pages

Please tell me about your church’s Facebook page so I can have the diocesan Facebook page “like” it.

St George’s, Maplewood  www.facebook.com/stgeo07040
Grace Church, Madison   www.facebook.com/gracemadisonnj
St. Paul’s, Chatham      www.facebook.com/stpaulschatham
St. Mary’s, Sparta       www.facebook.com/stmaryepiscopalsparta
Twitter www.twitter.com

After your church has mastered Facebook, you may (optionally) want to investigate Twitter.

Twitter may generate more followers if the account is associated with an individual (for example, your priest) rather than an organization (your church).

Keep in mind that many people use Twitter as a news aggregator.

Two ways to use Twitter beyond just broadcasting your church’s news and events:

1. Communicate with friends and strangers who are paying attention to the same event by using hashtags (#).

   Mark Beckwith @NewarkBishop
   On my blog: #MarriageEquality and the Affordable Care Act: attempts to redress separate but equal #ACA dioceseofnewark.org/bishops-blog/m...

   Mark Beckwith @NewarkBishop
   After #Zimmerman verdict our challenge is to face of storms of injustice, witness for hope & equity. #TrayvonMartin
   tinyurl.com/mjywp2

2. Use to get yourself on the radar screen of an influential individual (who may retweet to their own followers) by mentioning their Twitter ID preceded with an at sign (@).

   St. Paul’s Church @StPaulsChurchJC
   Students and teachers brought their backpacks to be blessed as another school year begins! #JerseyCity @dionewark
   pic.twitter.com/EQhesIEdCs

   Examples
   St. Mary’s Sparta @StMarysSparta
   St. Paul’s Jersey City @StPaulsChurchJC
   (Both these church Twitter accounts do a good job of mentioning @dionewark in their tweets so the diocesan Twitter account can easily retweet if appropriate.)
   Diocese of Newark @dionewark
   Bishop Mark Beckwith @NewarkBishop
**YouTube** [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

YouTube videos appeal to the auditory learners among the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. Videos are good for commemorating events, information that’s “evergreen” (i.e. always relevant), and stories.

Videos need not be polished, nor are high-end cameras and video editing tools always needed. Smartphones and iPads work, and editing apps are plentiful.

Videos need to be easy to see and hear, and short (4-5 minutes). Landscape orientation works best for viewing.

Set up a channel in the congregation’s name for ease in locating. Tag video content appropriately for search purposes.

See the “Geeks for God” blog post [www.dioceseofnewark.org/geeks/video-101](http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/geeks/video-101) for more information.

**Examples**

“Welcome to St. George's” in Maplewood [youtu.be/pEFDhdvdBmA](http://youtu.be/pEFDhdvdBmA)  
(St. George's channel: [www.youtube.com/user/StGeo07040](http://www.youtube.com/user/StGeo07040))

“Welcome to St. Mary's Episcopal Church of Sparta!” [youtu.be/DGtiELjyYlw](http://youtu.be/DGtiELjyYlw)  
(St. Mary’s channel: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCco0VEMJjH3ro6x1xWvESxw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCco0VEMJjH3ro6x1xWvESxw))

"Find What Is Real" (Church of the Holy Spirit, Lebanon, Diocese of New Jersey) [youtu.be/BLrQx9swfeA](http://youtu.be/BLrQx9swfeA)  
(Holy Spirit's channel: [www.youtube.com/channel/UC8P8WZGUaBG2IA0F0j_cWDA](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8P8WZGUaBG2IA0F0j_cWDA))

The Diocese of Newark’s channel: [www.youtube.com/user/DioNewark](http://www.youtube.com/user/DioNewark)

**Find out more**

Follow the diocesan “Geeks for God” blog, [www.dioceseofnewark.org/geeks](http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/geeks). We post every couple of weeks, and our posts are carried in *The VOICE Online*.

Episcopal Church Foundation Vital Practices ([www.ecfvp.org](http://www.ecfvp.org)) is loaded with good articles about and guidelines for social media usage by churches. Just search on “Facebook,” “Twitter,” “YouTube” or “social media.”

#ChSocM *(ch‐sock‐em)* is a weekly Twitter-based chat about using social media to build church and faith, held Tuesdays at 9 p.m. Eastern Time. Welcoming and ecumenical! See also their blog, [http://churchsocmed.blogspot.com](http://churchsocmed.blogspot.com).
The Church Website Project: Due diligence before you start your new website

The Church Website Project will allow churches who are using the diocesan web hosting to have a Drupal website under their own domain name. The diocese will provide a basic website template, and a consultant from the Technology Committee who will help you configure your new website to your congregation’s needs.

Before your congregation can be assigned a consultant to work with you on designing your new website, there are some things your congregation needs to do. When you have these items checked off, you will be ready to send the contact information for the lead person from your congregation (who will work with the consultant) to Nina Nicholson, Director of Communications & Technology, at nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org.

Diocesan Requirements
These are the same as the requirements of the diocesan loans and grants committees.

We are in compliance with all the obligations and financial reporting requirements of the diocese:

- Current Church Audit on file.
- Current on clergy and lay pension and health care payments.
- The following people need to have taken the Safeguarding God’s Children online training within the last five (5) years:
  1. All clergy whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, or otherwise who are engaged in ministry or service in the congregation.
  2. All paid personnel whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services in the congregation. For example, sexton, secretaries, youth minister, choir director, Christian Education Directors, school personnel, etc.
  3. Volunteers who are working with or supervising children and/or youth in the congregational setting.

Communications & Technology Requirements
An explanation of each communications and technology requirement follows.

- Our congregation has committed itself to continuing high standards of communication.
- We have a team in place to work with the consultant.
- We have reviewed our ministries and gathered our website content.
- We are establishing a web policy.
- We have made a plan to keep the website current.
- We either do not own a domain name, or have our domain name along with the administrative login needed to redirect it to the new website.
Having a website and maintaining it properly is a necessary part of communication in the 21st century. **Your congregation needs to commit itself to continuing high standards of communication.** This will mean a commitment on the part of the clergy, the wardens and the vestry to support the work of this project now and into the future. This is not a one-time promise. It is suggested that a vestry responsibility for communication in general and the website in particular be discussed and formally established. Further, it is necessary that one person on the vestry be given the oversight and authority to make decisions, allocate resources, and see that the work that needs to be done is, in fact, carried through. This is the step that will ensure that when an individual is transferred, the clergy leaves, or the wardens and vestry change, the website will still continue to be the visible sign of the church in cyberspace. The passwords will not disappear and the ownership of the website will not be in question. Everything will be owned by the clergy, wardens and vestry, not a single person.

**Find the people resources you need to make this project work.** This website project will have two stages. In the first stage the new site will be set up and configured. In the second stage it will be maintained and continue to grow. At the beginning you will have a consultant who has all the technical skills to set up your site. You will not need to have a technology professional to do this; that is the role of the consultant. **You will need someone with the knowledge and the authority to make decisions to work with the consultant to set everything in place.** This might be your vestry liaison. You may choose to have a small committee including your clergy, your vestry liaison, and (if available) members with artistic or technical skill. **You will also need someone who can be trained to work with the new system and teach it to the others in the congregation or staff who will be doing the on-going maintenance.** Again, a technology professional is not required, just someone who is familiar with computers and word-processing software who is willing to learn something new. Your people resources should include several different people and they may have over-lapping roles; it may include clergy, but should not rely solely upon them.

**Review your ministries.** Your website will tell the world who you are and what you are doing. The things that should stand out include when and where you worship and what you are doing as the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Strangers who visit your site are looking for that information, along with an answer to the question “Will I find people like me if I go there?”

The content you can post on your website which conveys this includes:

- Worship schedule and directions.
- Clergy, staff and lay leader headshots, contact information and areas of oversight.
- Calendar events.
- Ministry descriptions that are engaging and brief.
- Longer text content such as sermons, articles or announcements.
- Digital photographs for both page illustrations and online albums.
- (Optional) A blog by a clergy person, lay leader, or a group – BUT only if the blogger is willing and able to post at least twice a month. A blog by minors, such as a youth group blog, must have designated adult oversight.

Other member-specific content you may want to add includes:

- Downloadable resources, such as ministry schedules and forms in PDF format.
- Online forms, such as for event registration.
Sort that all out and collect text content together in electronic format (word or text documents). Photos should be the unedited, original JPG files as they came off the camera.

While you are gathering photos and information, you should also think about your web policy around names, photos and contact information for people. If you decide on a website permission form, get it going and get the releases you will need to make your site. As an example, all Diocese of Newark registration forms for youth events include this clause:

*I give my permission for photographs and/or video footage of my child to be used by the Diocese of Newark for promotional purposes (brochures, on diocesan websites, promotional videos, presentations, etc).*

When you put together the list of the things/pages/features you want, remember that it will be your job to maintain this and keep it current. It’s perfectly OK – in fact, it’s strongly recommended – to start with a small website that you can grow over time. For example, if you want a Youth Group but don’t have any children over the age of 8, you probably don’t need a Youth Group page just yet, but you may want to make a page for “Children and Youth Ministry” rather than just “Sunday School.” Set up a plan for who will update which parts of content on what schedule. If no one is responsible or anyone could do it, no one will actually do it after the first month.

One minor technical detail to take care of is the status of your domain name. If you don’t have one, that is fine. Domain names can be acquired inexpensively, and your consultant will work with you to do this. If you do have one, however, it will need to be changed to direct to the new website when it is completed. Someone “owns” that domain name and has the administrative login to it. You need to find that person, obtain the administrative login and have it available for your consultant.

**Suggested reading:** This article by our friends at the United Methodist Church is recommended reading for all churches contemplating a website: Online ‘shopping’: Church websites keep visitors in mind (http://www.umportal.org/article.asp?id=7222)

**Questions?** Please contact Nina Nicholson, Director of Communications & Technology, at nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org or 973-430-9907.