

## **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](mailto: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 Parochial Report on file.

\_\_\_\_\_ Current Church Audit on file.

\_\_\_\_\_ Current Pledge Commitment Card 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org) or 973-430-9907.