

# Parish Web Sites

## Desirable characteristics of a parish site

1. It is oriented to people *outside* the parish.
  - All home page links, except one, would be for people looking for a church—provide information on Spirituality (Prayer Book Spirituality—Eucharist, Office, Personal Devotions and other “maps;” ethos/culture of the Episcopal/Anglican tradition); what to expect on Sunday (Eucharist and coffee hour). Note that service times and location should *not* be found through links—they should be right on the home page.
  - Information about the inner workings of parish life might all be accessible through one link on the home page—e.g, “Parish Life” or “Parish Operations.”
2. Communicates that the parish is a resource for people’s life more than another competitor for their time, money, and energy.
  - A section on ministries would begin with a statement about the primary ministry of the baptized being in daily life with friends and family, at work, and in civic life. This might be followed with stories of members serving in each of those arenas. This might include quotes noting the organic nature of Christian action. Might offer a link to an explanation of the Renewal—Apostolate Cycle. The internal ministries of the church would be in the “Parish Life” section.
3. Is at least attractive, at best beautiful.
4. Communicates a “feel” for the culture of the parish and the Episcopal Church.
5. Is easy to navigate.
6. Is readable—uses large enough font and has contrasting font color and background.
7. Contains basic information on the home page—times of Sunday and weekday worship, parish address.
8. Is reasonably up-to-date—service times are accurate; special seasonal offerings are listed during the appropriate season, and then removed (for example, times of Holy Week services do not continue to appear in June); current staff and leadership are listed.
9. Is easy to update and revise from the parish office or the rector’s home.
10. Avoids annoying practices. For example, sounds, whether music or voices, that automatically present themselves, as opposed to sounds that the site visitor chooses to engage. Or an opening page that needs to be navigated past to get to the home page, such as an initial graphics-intention page that has to have a link saying “Skip introduction.”

## Additional thoughts on web sites

1. On the home page have
  - times of worship
  - address, phone number and e-mail address
  - pictures and/or images that give you a "feel" for the parish. Maybe a brief statement that captures the spirit of the parish (probably not a mission statement or a vision statement - they rarely communicate well outside the parish)
  - Keep the page focused on the core information that people seek first. Don't crowd the page with too many words. Avoid Flash home pages as the entry. Most people don't want to wait several minutes to get the information they are seeking.
2. Make it easy for people to get in contact -- give an e-mail address that sounds as though a real person will receive the message (therefore not "info@ ...." or "rector@ ..." or "office@ ...") Better to receive spam than to communicate hard-to-get.
3. Pictures that are large enough to give potential visitors an impression about:
  - What kind of people make up this parish? Shots of people in liturgy and at coffee hour are best.
  - What does the priest look like?
  - What does the liturgical space look like?
4. In words, images and tone needs to communicate the best of Episcopal/Anglican culture as well as that of the parish. Don't just talk about the value of beauty and grace in liturgy make the site beautiful and graceful. Don't just talk about how we value the spiritual life -- show people at the Eucharist and Office; have links to resources on spirituality; and have a section that explains the pattern of Anglican spirituality. Don't just talk about the importance of the ministry of the baptized and then highlight all the "in-parish" activities but tell stories and have some images of people at home, with friends, at work, and in civic life.

An example of communicating the "feel" of worship in words is at <http://www.stjvny.org/aboutworship.asp>

5. Don't apologize for who we are. Don't make jokes about Episcopalians and .... Don't explain about standing, kneeling and sitting in liturgy. It feels defensive and takes people away from the essential information.
6. Don't allow the taste of a volunteer control how the site looks or what's on it.
7. Present worship information so the basic information is offered in a brief form. For example:

### **Sunday**

8:00 Holy Eucharist

Approximately 40 minutes. A quiet, peaceful time of worship.

9:00 Holy Eucharist

Oriented toward families with young children. In the parish hall. More informal. Approximately \_\_ minutes. With hymns.

10:30 Holy Eucharist

A full liturgy with procession, congregational signing, the choir. Approximately \_\_ minutes. Followed by a social time.

### **During the Week**

Monday through Friday - 5:30 p.m. Evening Prayer

Wednesday – 6:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist

Thursday – 7:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist

## Resources

*Fill All Things: The Spiritual Dynamics of the Parish Church*

Available: <http://episcopalbookstore.com/product.aspx?productid=4292>

*In Your Holy Spirit: Shaping the Parish Through Spiritual Practice*

Available: <http://episcopalbookstore.com/product.aspx?productid=5619>

Enter “website design mistakes” into your search engine and spend some time looking at the websites. There are sites that list common errors, such as “43 Web Design Mistakes Your Should Avoid,” and also sites that show examples of good and bad web design.

Web design and hosting sites, such as [www.e-zekiel.com](http://www.e-zekiel.com), and [www.squarespace.com](http://www.squarespace.com). E-zekiel.com is specifically directed at churches.

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