

Webbed for Success

Building a Congregation Web Site

Seek organizational support. The support of your church communication committee, congregational council, committees, staff and congregation will be extremely helpful in undertaking this information intensive/cooperative effort that will call for on-going budget support. Go to www.elca.org/webministry/ for links to articles and statistics that will help you explain the importance of this vital communication tool in your congregation.

What does it take? Computer capability, modem, browser (Communicator, Firefox, etc.), ISP (Internet service provider), software if designing in-house (Dreamweaver, FrontPage, etc.), a host site, and registration of a domain name

How much will it cost? How much can you spend? There are many low-cost options including template sites* and free hosting, for example on Thrivent's Lutherans Online Web site at http://www.lutheransonline.com/servlet/lo_ProcServ/DBPAGE=cge . Probable costs are: monthly hosting fee, domain name registration (\$70 for two years), possible monthly fees for some optional programs. Note: Your ISP may offer free hosting for a modest-sized site. To register your domain name go to www.networksolutions.com , www.godaddy.com or www.register.com . For inexpensive hosting try these <http://www.iceishot.com/> , <http://www.hostcompare.com/> , http://www.createafreewebsite.net/web_hosting_comparison_chart.html .

Template/Database Site: If using a template site* there may be an initial set-up cost, then a monthly fee that includes hosting, and possible additional costs for increased requested services. Choose a company where technical assistance is included in the monthly fee.

If choosing to design and maintain the site rather than using a template site:

Designed by professional: Expenses are usually by the hour. Ask for references (check them) and to see several samples. Make sure you sign a contract that includes the date of delivery and fees. Gather all your content and have it ready in documents before giving it to the designer. Major changes and additions will add to the cost. Decide who will maintain the site before you begin. If it's other than a staff member or volunteer, this could add greatly to your monthly costs. Get a copy of the site on CD. Make sure in the contract that you own the site design.

Designed by volunteer:

This is the most economical but riskiest option, especially if the designer is a member. It's difficult to be honest about how you feel about the design. This is not a paying job so it will be on the volunteer's timetable. Make sure you ask for a back-up disk of the site in case the person leaves the congregation or moves. Ask which program was used to create the site; FrontPage and Dreamweaver are the most commonly used.

Consider a database: It has interactivity options like calendars and photo albums, updates without HTML, and can be updated online from various locations and therefore by several folks. This is how a template site works but could also be a requested part of a designed site.

Who will design, build, manage and maintain the site? Volunteer vs. professional, congregation or staff member, or a team? These are extremely important considerations in considering the complexity of the design and content. Make sure you can keep your site a manageable size so it can be kept fresh and updated.

Who will provide the original content? Pastor, a member of the congregation or staff, a committee? This can be a lengthy process. Having the content ready and proofed before the design phase can save considerable time and money. A site map is critical. (This is a layout of how the pages will flow from one to another.)

Where to find help? Helpful Resources are available from the ELCA.

ELCA Web Works - resources for enhancing your Web ministry: www.elca.org/webministry/

- ? The Basics: planning, designing, selecting tools you'll use and a host for your site, and maintaining your site.
- ? Getting Started
- ? What to Include: Site Content and Features
- ? Where to Put It: Web Hosting Services
- ? Other Resources

NC Synod Communications – Contact Donna Prunkl at the synod office. dprunkl@nclutheran.org .

Don't forget to promote it. Put the address (URL) on all your stationary, business cards, brochures, e-mail signatures, newsletters, church sign. Send it to the synod at rgodby@nclutheran.org and to the ELCA www.elca.org/scriptlib/it/cds_CongrWebPages/cds_main.asp to be included on their sites. Ask for our handout of promoting your site.

*A company that provides simplified Web site design and hosting for a fee. You select from template pages and insert your information. They can be maintained without special html coding knowledge and have a professional appearance. There are many; go to a search engine and check for "church web sites." We have experience with www.webmedley.net and www.cyberchurch.com but there are many others.

Elements of design

- ? KISS – Keep it simple saints!
- ? Each page should download in 8 seconds or less. Bulleted info or short phrases are best. Few people will read long pages of text – link to these. Keep them off the main pages.
- ? Reflect your congregation's style. (contemporary, traditional, geared to young families, etc.)
- ? Use your logo. Try to keep consistent look for all your marketing pieces: stationary, brochures, ads, signs, Web site.
- ? Keep fonts dark on a light background. The font size should be easily read and consistent.
- ? Simple backgrounds with light or no color are best.
- ? Use no more than three basic fonts throughout - headings, brief text and text.
- ? Limit graphics, especially on pages folks might want to print or call up often, i.e. the calendar.
- ? Large color photos, music and magic (animation) can be memory HOGS and can slow downloads. Watch file size; 72 dpi is all a monitor will project so save photos at that dpi.
- ? Add small photos and change them as often as possible. Consider a digital camera.
- ? For security reasons, do NOT identify folks in photos by name. Use generalizations like "our youth group" or "day care kids." Remember these photos can be copied.
- ? Click no more than three times to get to information. Plan wide, not deep.
- ? Keep the design or theme consistent throughout the site (Youth/children's pages excepted).
- ? Try to incorporate the ELCA logo. <http://www.elca.org/co/graphics/index.html>

Elements of Content – consider phases of growth

(Some may be considerations for Phase two or three)

- ? Contact information: include office hours, street & P.O. address, fax, phone, e-mail address.
- ? Worship and Sunday school times and those of other regularly scheduled events
- ? Location: address, map and directions; photo or drawing of church
- ? Staff names and contact info, especially e-mail addresses
- ? Nursery information
- ? Handicap accessibility and services, i.e. signing or earphones for the hearing impaired
- ? Special programs – kindergarten, quilters, after-school care, mother's morning out, Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, adult day care, soup kitchen, shelter
- ? Mission Statement, vision or goals, brief history
- ? Links to important sites: synod, synod youth, synod resource center online catalog, ELCA, NC Women of the ELCA, NC Lutheran Men, The Lutheran magazine, daily devotions, Bible studies, etc. These URLs can be found on the NC Synod site. www.nclutheran.org
- ? Also consider links to community sites, local paper, weather, etc. Folks will remember that they can get to all these important sites from one location – YOURS.
- ? Specialty groups and programs: Youth, Seniors, Women, Men, Music, Service, others
- ? Calendar, group activities, events, news (possible database areas). Keeping this current is CRITICAL! Members must be able to depend on the site if they are going to look to it for important information. You may consider incorporating Internet services that provide dynamic calendars, photo albums or online newsletters. Search www.google.com . For interactive calendar or album check these resources:
www.comresources.com/Store/CategoryPage.asp?catalog_category_id=5 or photo album
www.flickr.com .
- ? Members' contact info, prayer chains, and any other personal information should be “password protected” so that only your members can access the private information. Mail or e-mail the password to your members.
- ? Registration forms for events for downloading. Give Adobe Acrobat Reader downloading instructions if you are using pdf files.
- ? You can include dynamic direct feeds from the ELCA, Augsburg Fortress or The Upper Room. The ELCA has feeds for ELCA News, Daily Word, Bible Reading, Bible Verse and ELCA Prayer Ventures. Go to www.elca.org/webfeeds/index.html . Add links to the synod's resource center online catalog or to ELCA Resources. At Augsburg Fortress, they offer a daily Bible verse update to add to your website. Here is the link: <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/rss/index.asp#rss>
- ? Audio of sermon, concerts, choir. Be sure to include any download instructions.