# Church Website Guide

A website is an essential piece of church infrastructure. It's as important as your building's front door – it's where many people will encounter your church for the first time. Your website is often the first place people learn about who you are, explore your ministries and decide whether to visit. A clear, friendly and up-to-date site helps your parish extend its welcome far beyond its walls.

This guide is for churches who aren't sure where to start with planning a new website or updating an old one. It's meant to be a high-level introduction – if you have any questions, get in touch with the diocese's [Communications department](#)!

## Contents

# Getting started

Websites don't have to be expensive, but they do cost money. You'll need to include some basic costs in your annual budget for hosting and domain registration. These are predictable and relatively minor, ranging from $100-$500 a year, depending on the options you choose.

As you start to think about your new site, the main things you'll want to consider are:

- **Your goals:** What do you want your website to do? For example, help seekers find a church home, publicize events in the neighbourhood or increase online giving.

- **Your audience:** Who is your website for? Your existing parishioners? Newcomers? It can be more than one group, but pick one as your main audience.

- **Structure:** What pages and menu items do you want to include? How will you group pages in your menu?

- **Content:** Who's going to write it? What kind of tone do you want? Who will edit all of it to make sure it's consistent throughout the site?

- **Photos:** Do you have high-quality photos of worship and community life? What's missing?

You'll write content and structure your site differently depending on the goals and audiences you choose. You'll speak differently to seekers than to lifelong members, for instance. Thinking about these things before you start will help your new website be not just beautiful but strategic.


# Platform options

A platform is the tool or service you use to build and manage your website. When it comes to picking a platform, there are two main categories:

- **WordPress:** an open-source, highly customizable platform that gives you full control over design, functionality and hosting. It's powerful and flexible but requires a bit more technical setup and ongoing maintenance.

- **Hosted platforms:** all-in-one, user-friendly solutions (like SquareSpace or Wix) with built-in templates and hosting, and potentially some data recovery and support.

The platform you choose depends on what you need your website to do, your budget and the skills of the people you have on your team.

## WordPress

WordPress sites are truly the best in terms of customization. You can get a fully custom website – designed just for you – or choose a theme to edit and personalize. Then you can add plug-ins, which are tools that give your site the functions and features you need, like an events calendar or a sermon library.

Depending on what themes and plug-ins you choose, WordPress can be a pricier option. Custom sites are the most expensive (often $3,000 and up for design and set-up), or you can choose an existing theme. Some themes and plug-ins are free, and some have an extra one-time or annual cost.

You'll also need someone, whether it's a web designer or a person on your team, who's comfortable with basic technical tasks to get everything set up. Picking a theme, installing plug-ins, choosing a web host and pointing your domain to your new site can be a bit complicated – but you can also get everything just the way you want it.

Hosting costs will be separate. If your church has a website now, you're already paying for a web host. You'll most likely be able to keep your web host for a new WordPress website. If you're moving from a hosted platform to WordPress, you'll need to sign up for new, separate hosting.

A good web developer can set you up with a custom site, arrange all the plug-in and hosting details for you and then train a few people on your team to make routine updates.

## Hosted platforms

Websites on hosted platforms are easier to set up and maintain, with the advantage of all-in-one services, but they may offer less customization and long-term flexibility than WordPress. They typically use drag-and-drop builders, so you'll need less technical skill on your team.

There's no coding involved in setting up and managing a site like this, but you'll still need someone who can do basic design – picking colours, adding images and text, and moving things around to make them look great.

A big advantage of hosted platforms is that they include hosting, along with some level of security, back-ups and support. They're major platforms with millions of customers, so they tend to be stable and secure.

These platforms are also widely used, so there are how-to guides and video tutorials if you get stuck along the way.

### SquareSpace

SquareSpace is a polished, all-in-one website builder known for professional-looking templates and an intuitive drag-and-drop editor. It balances ease of use with strong design flexibility, making it a popular choice for churches that want a visually appealing site without a steep technical learning curve.

### Wix

Wix is a popular drag-and-drop website builder with a wide range of templates and built-in tools, making it easy for beginners to create a good-looking site quickly. Wix tends to offer the most customization.

### Weebly

Weebly is very simple and beginner-friendly, so you can get a basic site online quickly. It's easy to use, but it doesn't offer as many design choices or features if you want your site to grow over time. Users report that it's out of date compared to SquareSpace and Wix.

### Tithely

Tithely is a church-oriented platform that offers a range of services, including giving platforms, apps and database solutions – or you can stick with just a website. Because it's meant for churches, it focuses on web features that churches might need – like an events calendar, a sermon archive and a plan-your-visit tool.

Tithely uses templates that are customizable to a certain degree, and set-up is quick. It offers less design freedom than other platforms, but its websites are solid. Tithely might be a good option if you think you might need its other services in the future.


## Hosting

Your web host is where your website lives on the internet. Some platforms ("hosted platforms") include hosting for you, so you don't have to worry about the technical details. If you use WordPress, you'll need to choose a hosting service separately.

Hosting involves a yearly cost that you should include in your church's budget – it's the bricks-and-mortar cost of maintaining a presence on the internet.

When you're choosing a web host, look for a provider with servers in or near Canada. Look for a host with a strong reputation for reliability and uptime (so your site stays online), good customer support and easy-to-use tools. Make sure they offer automatic backups and security features like SSL certificates. Compare pricing and renewal rates to avoid surprises, and read reviews from other Canadian nonprofits and churches if they're available.

# Domains

A domain is the address people type into their browser to visit your website – like www.stswithuns.ca. It's how people find your church online, and it gives your site a professional, easy-to-remember identity.

You usually register (buy) a domain through a domain registrar. Many website builders like SquareSpace, Wix or Tithely can help you get one as part of setting up your site. If you choose WordPress, you can register your domain through any registrar.

Keep your domain short, simple and easy to spell. Thinks about how it will look written out and how easy it will be to say out loud. Use your church's name, if you can.

If you already have a domain registered, you can transfer the domain's registration to a platform like SquareSpace or Wix, or you can keep paying for it separately through the registrar. Transferring it to your hosted platform keeps everything in one place, while keeping it separate means you won't have to transfer it again if you decide to switch platforms.

When you're choosing a registrar, look for one that offers .ca domains at a reasonable price, includes easy management tools (so renewing or updating your domain is simple) and provides strong customer support in case you need help. It's also helpful to pick a registrar that offers privacy protection (keeping your contact information private) and clear renewal pricing, so you're not surprised by fees later. Well-known Canadian registrars are often a good choice because they understand local rules for .ca domains and may offer support tailored to Canadian organizations.


# Responsive design

Responsive design means your website automatically adjusts to look good on any device – phones, tables or computers. Many people visit websites on their phones, so you want to make sure everyone can read your content, see images clearly and navigate easily without zooming or scrolling sideways.

Most website builders make your site responsive by default, though some older templates or special layouts may need small tweaks. With WordPress, responsiveness depends on the theme you choose, so it's worth picking a modern, well-supported theme to make sure your site works well on all screen sizes.

## Accessibility

Accessibility means making your website easy to use for everyone, including people with vision, hearing or mobility challenges. While most churches in Ontario aren't legally required to meet strict accessibility standards, following best practices will make your site more welcoming to everyone.

Most website platforms and popular WordPress themes already include features that help with accessibility, so your site will likely be partly accessible out of the box. Best practices include adding alt text for images (text that describes what an image is showing); using header tags in your content; writing clear link text (not just "click here"); and checking colour contrast.

## Getting outside help

You might decide to hire someone from outside the parish to help set up your website. Whether you're hiring a professional web designer, bringing in a student to help or finding a local volunteer, make sure they understand your needs and can explain their approach to you in plain language.

Ask who will maintain the site after it's launched and whether they'll provide training. Make sure you receive full admin access, logins and documentation so the church isn't dependent on one person. Check that they'll build the site on a platform your parish can realistically update, and confirm they're following best practices for accessibility, security and backups. Finally, ask for examples of their previous work and be clear about timelines, costs and what support is included. Sign a contract that includes these details.

Getting outside help can be a great option, but you'll still need strong support from a parish team that can make decisions, set a strategic direction and write content.

## Your content

Your website should be focused on what your users need to know and do. Once you know who your primary audience is (e.g. seekers looking for a church home), you can determine what that audience needs to do on your website: find service times; watch sermons; give online; sign up for events.

Deciding who your audience is and what they need will help you make decisions about what information you need to include, where it lives on your site and what kind of tone to use as you write. Less is more – the things your own members think are important may not be the most important to your target audience. Don't overwhelm your visitors with too much information right up front.

If you have an existing website with content, that's great! Some of it may be perfect for your new website. You should review everything while keeping your target audience and main goal in mind. You can check out other church websites for inspiration, but don't take their content.

## Essential information

- **Contact info:** Put the church address, phone number and email address on a Contact Us page, and include them in your header or footer so they're available on every page.

- **Service times:** Put this on your home page so it's obvious and easy to find.

- **Seasonal info:** Make your Christmas and Easter services easy to find and post them well beforehand.

- **Newcomers' FAQ:** What would someone new to your church be wondering about? What information would help them feel comfortable?

- **Who you are:** Say something about your community and include details about your worship leaders.

## Nice-to-have information

- **Events calendar:** Could be a simple list of dates and times, or you could use a plug-in or widget to get more functionality. Whatever you choose, keep it up to date.

- **Online giving:** You can embed a CanadaHelps form right on your website or provide a link to let people give online.

- **Livestream link:** Most people will check out a livestreamed service before they come in-person to see what they can expect.

## Navigation

Navigation is how visitors move through your website. Clear navigation helps people find what they need quickly. Keep menus simple and group related pages in the same section. Prioritize essential information where it's easy to see – think back to your target audience.

A well-structured website is welcoming and easy to use, and it will help newcomers feel confident in finding what they're looking for.

## Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) means making your website easy for people to find when they search for a church in your area. You don't need special skills to improve your site's visibility – a few simple practices make a big difference.

Use clear page titles and headings that describe what's on each page, like "About Our Church," "Service Times" or "Children & Youth Ministry." Include your city or neighbourhood name in a few strategic places, especially on your home page and contact page. Write content in plain language that answers the kinds of questions newcomers may search for, such as what to expect on Sunday or how to find the building.

Make sure your contact information is accurate everywhere it appears online – your website, Google Business Profile and social media – so search engines know they all point to the same church.

## Photography

Words are important, but photos will help people connect with your church in a way that words alone can't. Smiling faces on your home page will give web visitors a sense of your community and whether they might belong there.

Photos of the outside of the building are okay, but the best photos will show the members of your community worshipping, socializing and participating in your communal life. It could be worth paying a professional photographer or a skilled amateur to visit your parish one Sunday to get new, high-quality photos of your community to really make your website pop.

You can use stock photos, but not too many – you want your website to feel like you. You also need to be mindful of copyright for any photos that aren't yours.

## Logo & branding

A logo is a great idea to give your church a recognizable symbol that you can use on your website, print material, signage and social media. It helps all of your media feel consistent and professional. Even a simple logo can make your church look more welcoming, trustworthy and organized to newcomers and members alike.

You can hire a graphic artist to come up with a new logo for your parish. If you already have a symbol you use informally as a logo, a graphic artist can make a polished version of that symbol as a logo.

## Security

Once your website is up and running, it's important to keep it safe for both your church and your visitors. Good security helps prevent hacks and makes sure everyone has a smooth experience. Here are some key tips:

- Use HTTPS (an SSL certificate) so connections to your site are secure – especially important if you're collecting donations online. This is built in on some platforms, or you may need to pay an extra fee to your web host.

- If you're using WordPress, keep your software, themes and plugins up to date. Outdated plugins can create vulnerabilities on your site. Install plugins only from trusted sources.

- Make sure your web administrators and editors are choosing strong passwords. Use two-factor authentication if possible.

- Limit access to what people need. Know the different user types of your platform (e.g. administrator, editor) and use them. Not everyone needs to be an administrator.

- Back up your website regularly so you can restore it if something goes wrong.

- Make sure more than one person knows how to log in and manage the site, so you don't lose access if someone leaves. The priest, the parish administrator and the churchwardens should all have access, even if they aren't responsible for managing the site.

- Make sure more than one person knows where your domain is registered and who your web host is, how to log in and when those services will come up for renewal. Emails about these services should go to the church office.

# Evaluation

Once your site is live, it's helpful to know how it's being used. [Google Analytics](#) is a free tool that measures who's visiting your website, how they're finding it, where they're from and any other metric you might want to know.

Some website builders include their own metrics – these likely aren't as robust as Google Analytics, but they'll tell you something about how your site is performing.

# FAQs

**How often should we update our website?**
Build a website that makes sense for the team that's available to manage it. Updating service times for Christmas and Easter is a must, but if you don't have someone on hand who can make weekly changes, don't make your website too complicated. For some parishes, service times, contact information and an address are the most important things – and those don't tend to change often.

At the basic level, you always want to make sure your contact information and services time are accurate. Plan periodic checks on your site to make sure things still work, pages look good and links aren't broken.

If you have someone who can make updates more often, consider adding some details about weekly services, like worship bulletins or announcements, livestream links or past sermons.

If you have more energy, you can keep your site fresh with upcoming events, news or blog posts. The most important thing is not to let content get stale. Don't let your home page be months out of date!

**Who should be responsible for managing the website?**
Ideally a small team, not one person – often the priest, parish administrator and a volunteer with basic web skills. Whoever it is, make sure they're not the only person who can log in. Decide and document how decisions get made (e.g., who approves content, how often content is reviewed, who can publish).

**Do we need permission to post photos of people?**
Legally speaking, you can take and post photos from any public event, but it's better to do more than the law requires to make sure people are comfortable. If you're using a photo on your website that features someone prominently, ask their permission before you use it.

If you plan to use any photos where children are easily identifiable or the main focus of an image, get their parent or guardian to fill out a photo release form.

Some people can't have their photos posted online because of security concerns. If you know ahead of time that a photographer will be visiting the church, let your congregation know and ask them to come forward privately with any concerns. You might decide to include text in your bulletin or slideshow that photographs taken at a particular service might be used in print and online promotional material.

**What about social media? Should we be on Facebook, Instagram or TikTok?**
A website is essential; social media is optional. Start with one platform you can maintain well rather than spreading yourself thin. Your website and social media channels don't need deep technical integration – the main goal is to help people move easily between platforms and to make sure your content looks good wherever it's shared.

Include links to your active channels (like Facebook or Instagram) in your website header or footer so visitors can find them easily. Make sure your site uses good photos, clear titles and descriptive text, because these will appear automatically when someone shares a link on social media.

Some platforms allow you to embed a feed of recent social media posts on your website, but this is optional. Many churches find it adds clutter without much benefit. What matters most is keeping your website up to date and using social media well on its own terms.

As with a website, make sure more than one person knows how to log in and manage your social media channels. For more tips on social media, see the Online Mission & Ministry web page.

**Can we integrate other services and platforms with our website?**
Yes! The platforms and services you choose will determine how this happens, but usually it's pretty easy to embed or integrate things like email newsletter sign-up forms, Google calendars, livestreams and online giving.