



Parish Development Ministry
Diocese of Midwest
Orthodox Church in America

September 15, 2011

IMPROVING YOUR PARISH WEBSITE

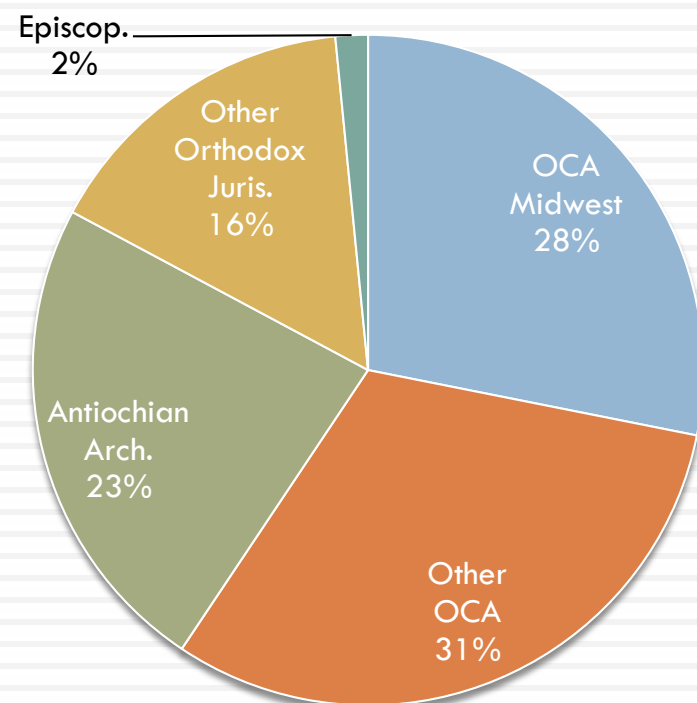
9/15/2011

Parish Development Webinar Series

Registrant Profile

2

- Parish Size – from 5 to greater than 500
- 23% Clergy
- 42% are parish webmasters
- 51% asked for their site to be reviewed
- Areas of focus
 - 66% or more are involved with content.
 - 67% involved with technical (posting/design etc.)



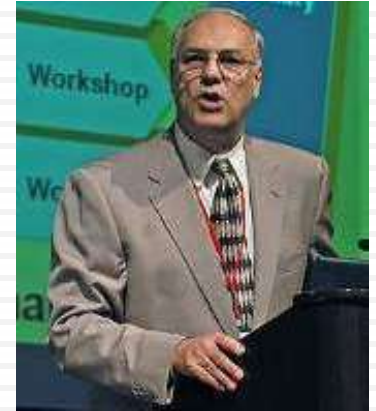
Parish Background



Your Presenter: Joseph Kormos

3

- Parish Development Ministry, Diocese of Midwest
 - ▣ Visited >40 parishes in last five years
- Secular experience
 - ▣ Software Product Marketing Manager
 - ▣ Consultant
- NOT a professional web designer, copywriter or graphics designer.



Webinar Goals

4

- Inspire
 - ▣ To strengthen your site
- Offer
 - ▣ Ideas, suggestions & examples
- Not...
 - ▣ Scare you!
- Assumptions
 - ▣ Moderate effort
 - 1-2 x/week for web development
 - ▣ You are not
 - A graphic designer
 - Copywriter
 - Tech guru
 - Theologian
 - ▣ Parish has:
 - A good story to tell
 - “Warts”

What We Will Discuss This Evening

5

- Why Websites?
- Common Parish Website Mistakes (IMO!)
- Understanding Your Audience
- Telling Your Parish Story
- Using Photos Well
- A Website Outline

Handling questions from you will be a challenge tonight! I'll do my best.



Disclaimer

6

This session will offer lots of *opinions*.

Hopefully some/many of them will be of value to you!

You will probably not agree with all of them.

I would be happy to hear from you about your areas of agreement and disagreement.

Before I Forget... a Valuable Offer

7

- Orthodox Web Solutions offer to (live and archive) attendees of this webinar:
 - Free setups (\$125 savings) to any parishes that sign-up from having seen your webinar.
 - Please say you heard about it here!



8

Importance of Parish Websites

A Fundamental Premise...

9

- *“Just as individuals with good intentions can benefit from learning listening skills for their personal relationships and speaking skills for their oral communication, so **congregations can benefit from considering the implications of the ways they communicate and what they are communicating.** In this age of rapidly proliferating communication technologies, this task of evaluation is even more urgent.”*



Why are Websites Important?

10

The front door to your parish. First impression!

- People make “taste and see” decisions
- Drive beyond one parish for another



The Jobs of Your Website

11

- Communicate information

- ▣ What/when/where/why

- Express your parish's identity

Tell the world...

- Who you are, what you do and what you stand for.

- That you “Proclaim Christ”

- Help to reshape parish identity

- ▣ Help the parish understand who they are – and the importance of talking to others.



Key Background Points

Why Websites Are Important

12

- Website more important for an Orthodox parish
 - ▣ Orthodoxy not well known (*Who knew!*)
 - ▣ Technology levels playing field
 - “Helps little guys look big”
 - ▣ High uniqueness
 - ▣ Inaccurate stereotypes
- Switching
 - ▣ 44% of Americans have switched religions.
 - ▣ Lapsed Catholics are third largest “religious body” in US.



13

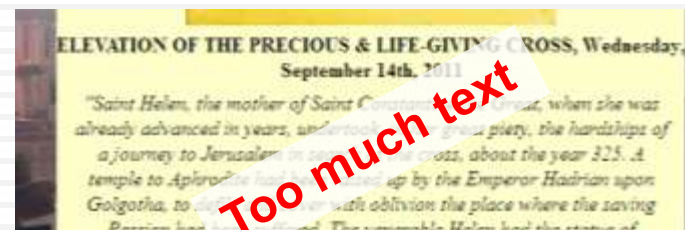
Common Website Mistakes

In My Opinion!

Common Website Mistakes (IMO!)

14

- ❑ Out of date info
- ❑ Important info left out/buried
- ❑ Unn attractive
 - ❑ Too much text
 - ❑ Fonts; font size; bold, clutter; color; layout; clip art
- ❑ Poor use of photos and graphics
- ❑ Tech toys



SLOPPY TEXT
multiple fonts, underline, **bold**,
italics, **ALL CAPS**, text size
and color. **PARTICULARLY** avoid
USING THEM together!



Common Website Mistakes (IMO!)

15

- ❑ Apologizing
- ❑ Talking to Ourselves
 - ▣ Parish history lessons
 - ▣ Orthodox jargon
 - ▣ “...Father Basil was assistant priest at *St. Elijah* from 1992 to 2002...”
- ❑ Unwelcoming
 - ▣ Unduly formal, pedantic, even arcane
 - ▣ Premature theology lessons
 - ▣ Ancient & foreign vs. today, alive and here
- ❑ Lack clear focus –internal or external
 - ▣ Too much? Unclear purpose?
 - ▣ Disconnect with audience



Understanding Your Audience

Defining Users and Their Needs

A Communication Planning Form

17

| | Audience/User | Needs | Stereotypes to be Addressed | Key Points to Make |
|---------------------|---|-------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Orthodox | Parish Veterans | | | |
| | Parish newcomers | | | |
| | Parents | | | |
| | Youth | | | |
| | Possible (in-bound) transfers <i>(new to town; switching parishes)</i> | | | |
| | Dormant | | | |
| Non Orthodox | Roman Catholics | | | |
| | Liturgical Protestants | | | |
| | Evangelical Protestants | | | |
| | Unchurched | | | |
| Either | Visitors to events (weddings etc) | | | |
| | Neighbors | | | |



Understanding Your Audience(s)

18

- Realistically what kinds of people are most likely to be attracted to your church?
 - ▣ Which will stay & grow in their love for Christ?
 - ▣ What are their needs?
- What are the important qualities that should be attractive to this audience?
 - ▣ Of Orthodoxy
 - ▣ Of your parish
- How can this be communicated?



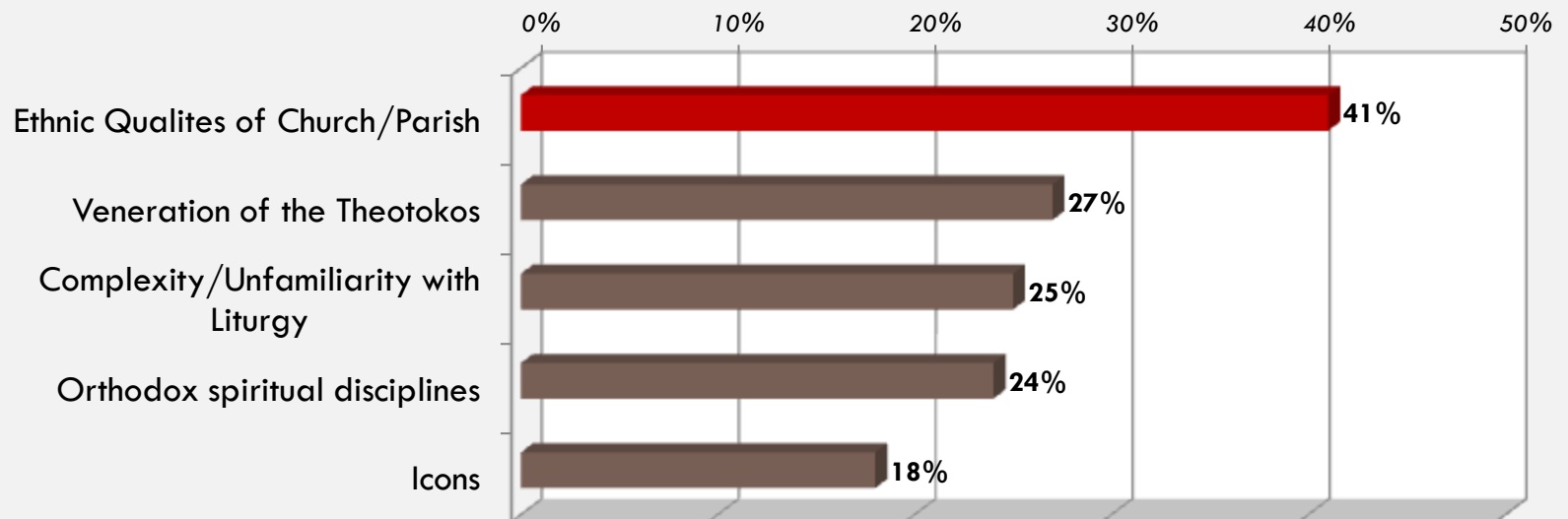
Profile of Inquirers

2009 Diocese of Midwest Survey --149 Convert Respondents

19

- 88% College Educated
- 29% switched more than once
- Previous reading about Orthodoxy (web)

Difficulties and Differences Experienced by Orthodox Converts in America



Consider Stereotypical Reactions

What might web visitors be assuming about your parish?

20

□ Orthodoxy

- Food festivals
- Culture club: Ethnic; immigrants; not English
- Unfriendly; closed to outsiders
- Strange; severe; old world;
- Not relevant; ancient
- Like “Catholics” >> Celibate clergy
- Don’t know bible
- White & Old
- Complex
- Colorful >> Infighting
- Zealots
- Idolatry
- Music

□ Churches in General

- Gossip
- Judgmental
- Empty
- Too big
- Closed
- Old People
- Sunday “entertainment”
- Church service = Sermon

**Often gracefully confronting wrong stereotypes can be important and helpful.
How can a website help do that?**

User's Key Questions

21

□ Basic

- Where are you located? How do I get there?
- Is there parking?
- What times are services? In general.
- Specifically?
- How do I contact the church?
- During what hours can I contact the church?
- How can I contact the priest?
- What kind of church is it?
- What kind of *Orthodox* Church is it?

□ Advanced -- *Preference Generating*

- Give me a feel for the personality of the priest and the parish?
- Are there people in this parish like me? Will I feel at home?
- What can I do here? What is here for me?
- What do they have for my children?
- How seriously do they take their faith?
- What's the music like?
- How do I become a member?
- Why this parish? What's the unique story here – the one that makes this the place right for me?

Telling Your Parish Story

A Few Key Communication Elements for Your Site

Communicating with Inquirers

23

Goals

1. **Welcome**

- ▣ Say it; show it throughout the site



2. **Build trust**

- ▣ We won't be in your face; zealots; we respect you as a person

3. **Generate curiosity**

- ▣ Introduce topics slowly; Offer info in layers

4. **Action**

- ▣ Take a first step –visit, call, look around
- ▣ Dispel fears; show uniqueness AND sameness



Beware of Adjectives

Better to Say Too Little than Too Much

24

□ Overstating

- “... is a *thriving* congregation
....*one of the largest*
- one of the *premier* parishes...
- a *leading force* ...
- an *instrumental example*...
- parish with *true vision* ...
- *booming* Sunday School ...
- one of the *foremost choirs in the country*...
- parish commitment *second to none!*”

□ Apologizing

“we are a *small* *but* active parish...”

□ Instead

“*small* *and*...”

Try this:

“... *big* enough to offer a variety of ministries --with more being developed -- and *yet small* enough to be *warm* and *personal* with many opportunities for fellowship.”

Personal Narratives

Tell Stories

25

- 'You won't be alone. We have others like you.'

Our Members on Our Faith at Holy Trinity Parish

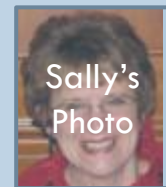
"Becoming Orthodox for me was the natural end of my search for an authentic and true catholic Anglo-Catholic Anglican. Although I remain close to both communions, and while both reflect the undivided Church, only Holy Orthodoxy possesses the fullest vision of the Church founded by Christ. The Truth of God in His Church. For me, this Truth was found by *coming home* to the true catholic sacraments for 2000 years... *Holy Orthodoxy.*" -- Paul, non-profit fundraiser

"I remain grateful for the Baptist upbringing and Calvinist education that taught me faith in Christ. I concluded that these traditions fell short of the full expression of the New Testament Church. To my surprise and satisfaction -- in the historic liturgy and organic continuity of the Orthodox Church -- my children become as we look forward to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ each Sunday. I graduate

"My conversion to Orthodoxy was not based on emotional or social needs but rather a hunger for truth. For many years, I felt disillusioned and discouraged because the faiths that I had been taught were untrue. This "more" I found is in the Orthodox Church. I no longer was my own secret

meet the parish

Sally Smith
Westhaven WI



Sally's
Photo

Sally has been attending St XXX for five years, having been raised in a (ethnic) Orthodox parish.

Why St XXXX is My Home Parish

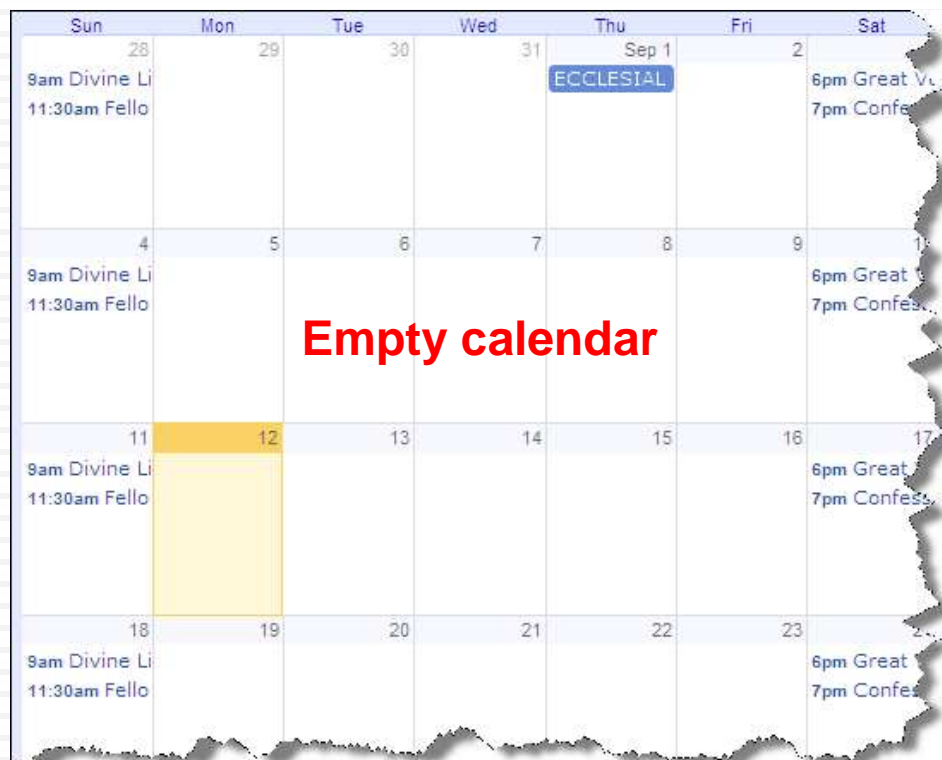
St XXX is simply an exciting spiritual home. It provides a link to the church of my youth while offering a sense of mission and community that works for my family. At St. XXXX we're truly bringing the Orthodox faith to all people.



(Often) Missing Info

26

- Empty calendar
- Priest photo and greeting
- Parish overview
 - ▣ Who we are, what we value
 - ▣ Putting best foot forward
- When and where
- Xpressway accessibility
- Parking
- “English language”
- Service descriptions
- Ministry info
- Membership/ Stewardship info
- Bookstore
- Reading List



Empty calendar

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|--------------------|-----|---------------------------|
| 28 9am Divine Li 11:30am Fello | 29 | 30 | 31 | Sep 1 ECCLESIAL | 2 | 6pm Great V 7pm Confes |
| 4 9am Divine Li 11:30am Fello | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 6pm Great V 7pm Confes |
| 11 9am Divine Li 11:30am Fello | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 6pm Great V 7pm Confes |
| 18 9am Divine Li 11:30am Fello | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 6pm Great V 7pm Confes |



Missing Info – Public Events

27

- Talk about events that enable your members become inviters.
 - ▣ Marital Classes
 - ▣ Parenting classes
 - ▣ Concerts
 - ▣ Financial Planning management series
 - ▣ Lecture series/ Topical classes
 - ▣ Bible studies
 - ▣ Meeting place for professional organizations
 - ▣ Grief support groups
 - ▣ Art shows
 - ▣ Teen nights
 - ▣ ‘Welcome to the Neighborhood’ events
 - ▣ Parent’s Night Out



Describing Ministries

28

- Act like somebody —from the “outside” — will be interested.
- Church school
 - ▣ What do we study? How do we teach? Class grades? When do we meet? Forms? Safety?
- When does next adult class start? Past topics? Next topics? Interactive?
- And more....



A Communication Planning Form

29

| | Audience/User | Needs | Stereotypes to be Addressed | Key Points to Make |
|---------------------|--|-------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Orthodox | Parish Veterans | | | |
| | Parish newcomers | | | |
| | Parents | | | |
| | Youth | | | |
| | Possible (in-bound) transfers (<i>new to town; other</i>) | | | |
| | Dormant | | | |
| Non Orthodox | Roman Catholics | | | |
| | Liturgical Protestants | | | |
| | Evangelical Protestants | | | |
| | Unchurched | | | |
| Either | Visitors to events | | | |
| | Neighbors | | | |



30

Using Photos Well

Let People See Who You Are

Using Photos Well

31

- Orthodox Christianity is photogenic

- Icons/ architecture
- Candlelight
- Liturgical/sacramental “action”

- People

- To an extent church selections are made based on “atmosphere” & people
- So... show people ... & atmosphere



Using Photos Well

32

□ Keys

- Not fuzzy!
- Good light (sunshine/candle light)
- Properly cropped/framed
- Limit broad panoramas —tight shots of faces or interesting elements
- Emotive



Integrate photos with text

DO NOT ...

keep all photos on "photo album" page!



Read "Taking Parish Photos"



Using Photos Well

33

- Use active/action shots when possible



Repeat yourself visually. It makes you easier to remember.



Using Photos Well

34

- Use active/action shots when possible



Good



Better



Using Photos Well

35

- Use with discretion
 - ▣ “Big Liturgy”
 - ▣ And...
 - 3 bar crosses
 - Onion domes
 - Bishop’s Blessing
 - People too dressed up – or sloppy
 - Too much bake sale or fund raising



Probably a bit “much” for many inquirers



Using Photos Well

36

- Avoid showing an empty church



Watch what you show –
Consider the visual cues that you send.



Using Photos Well

37

□ Test

- ▣ If part of your audience is non- Orthodox -- use them to test.



"We do not deal much in fact when we are contemplating ourselves."

Mark Twain



Needed Parish Photos

Using Photos Well

38

- Possible Categories
 - ▣ People/Families Children
 - ▣ The Temple
 - ▣ Worship
 - ▣ Sacraments
 - ▣ Leadership
 - ▣ Ministry
 - ▣ Community
 - ▣ Parish History(?)



Children, Families People

Needed Parish Photos

39

- ❑ Multiple age groups
- ❑ Different demographics
- ❑ Smiling, hugging
- ❑ Learning Praying, Singing



Temple

Needed Parish Photos

40

□ Church

- ▣ Exterior —overall (sunny day1)
- ▣ Close up of an attractive detail (dome/sign/window/arch)
- ▣ Vertically oriented photo 4x taller than width
- ▣ Horizontally oriented photo (4-5:1)
- ▣ Interior wide
- ▣ Icons
 - Close ups/ In situ
- ▣ Decorated cross (flowers)(Sunday of cross)



Worship

Samples

41



Worship

Needed Parish Photos

42

- Liturgical
 - ▣ Censing; Little entrance; Epistle reading –layperson; Priest reading gospel; Great entrance; Altar boys; Kissing cross/icon
- Overall congregation with full church
 - ▣ Sunny day
 - ▣ Or at night (candlelight)
 - ▣ Feast day
- 1-2 people with heads bowed
- Choir
 - ▣ Singing -- few people not necessarily the entire group
 - ▣ Music sheet
 - ▣ Director –intense but joyful
- Child lighting candle
- People entering church reverently
- Hierarchal liturgy



Sacramental

Needed Parish Photos

43

- Communion
 - ▣ Adult
 - ▣ Child
- Wedding
- Baptism
- Adult or baby chrismation
- Ordination
- Anointings



Leadership

Needed Parish Photos

44

- Active interested group discussing something around table or flip chart
- 2-3 photos of priest ... mostly looking approachable and warm
 - ▣ Priest in formal pose (headshot)
 - ▣ With family
 - ▣ Informal smiling ... shaking hands/hugging
 - ▣ Holding a baby... whatever!



Leadership group in action!



Priests have families!

Education

Samples

45



Ministry

Needed Parish Photos

46

- Charitable
- Youth: fun
- Decorating church
- Working on building
(lawn; maintenance;
leaf raking etc.)
- Choir
- Library
- Archives



Community

Needed Parish Photos

47

□ People together

- ▣ Social hour
- ▣ People hugging/laughing
- ▣ Teens
- ▣ Seniors
- ▣ Kids
- ▣ Men
- ▣ Women
- ▣ Eating
- ▣ Celebrating



Parish Family



College Group



Men! In Church! Smiling!



Communal Meal



Social Event

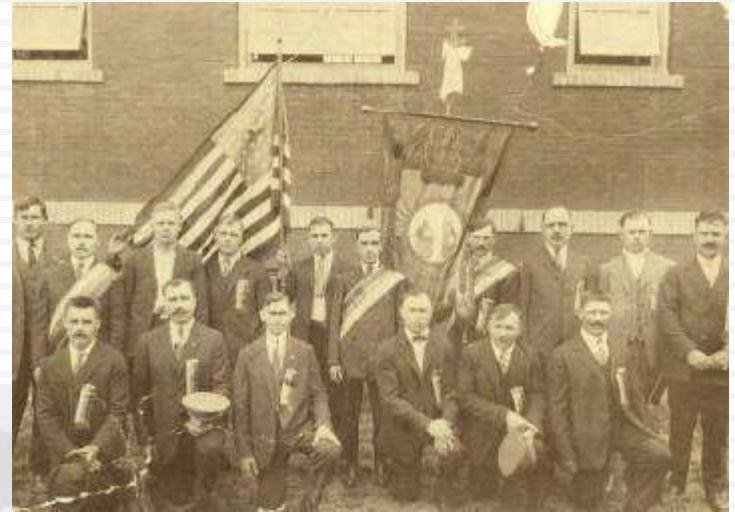
Parish History

Needed Parish Photos

48

If a history page is important –dress it up with photos! This will generate better response than text only from parish veterans and outsiders.

- Keep short and relevant to all.
- Tell a Story -- of Interest!



Implementation Steps

49

Identify planning constraints

- What can you spend? How much time? How often updated?
- Source of info? Existing? New?
- Approval?

Decide on website objectives and purpose

- Balance: Internal ↔ External

Understand users & audiences

- List >> Prioritize >> Profile audiences
- Needs, assumptions, questions, stereotypes

Identify key communication elements for your site

- Photos/graphics
- Text/topics/articles/ stories

Organize basic structure

- Identify info sources for each section
- Define menu structure
- Overall layout



50

Sample Parish Website Outline

SAINT JOHN ORTHODOX CHURCH

[Home](#)[Our Parish](#)[Worship](#)[Ministry &
Outreach](#)[Education](#)[About
Orthodoxy](#)[Service
Schedule](#)[Contact
Us](#)

Welcome from Father Thomas

Photo

Contact Us
/Map

Relevant
photo

News

News

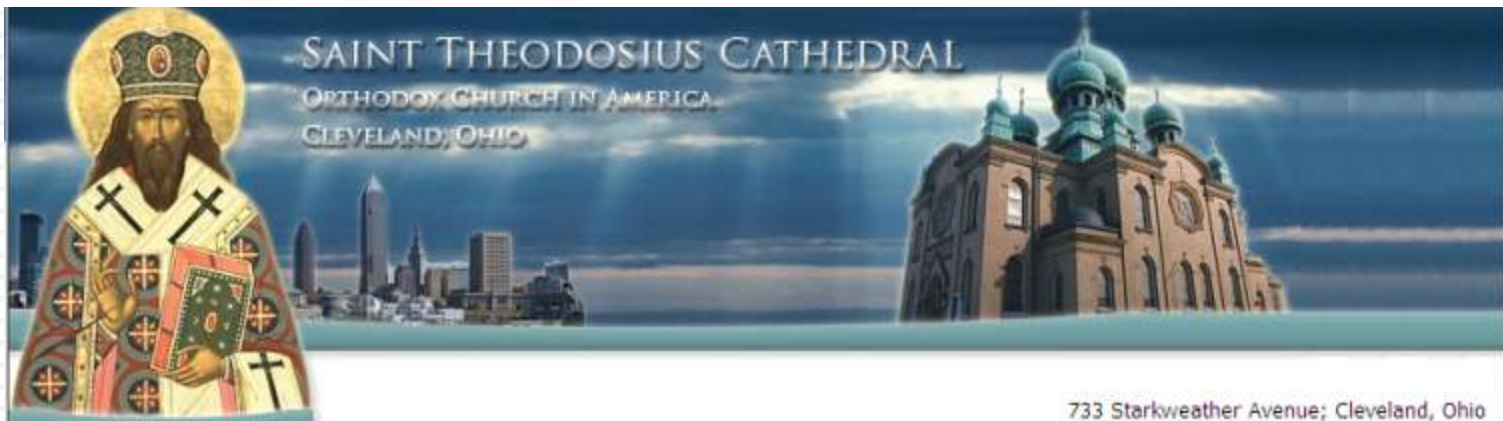


Schedule

Relevant
photo

News

Links



[Home](#)

[Our parish](#)

[Music
& Worship](#)

[Ministry &
Outreach](#)

[Children &
youth](#)

[Adults](#)

[Inquirers](#)

[Info](#)

[Bookstore](#)

Welcome from rector

Timely parish
photo or
clergy photo
(linked to
video)

[More info >](#)

News/announcements

photo

[Regular
Schedule](#)

[Contact info](#)

[Driving
Directions link](#)

[Calendar Link](#)

photo

| Home page | Our Parish | Music and Worship | Ministry & Outreach | Children & Youth | Adults | Inquirers | Info |
|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Welcome •Main News items •Calendar •News Links •Regular Schedule •Bulletins •Contact info | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rector's greeting (written & video) •Parish Vision •Clergy & Staff •Parish leadership/ Council •FAQ •Becoming a member •Stewardship & Pledging •Church History & Visual Tour •OCA/ Diocese of Midwest/ •Parish docs (password) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Worship schedule •Service order (link to OCA site) •Annual / Daily weekly/ Lenten cycle •Choir •Readers •Altar and Decorating •Glossary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Pastoral care •Music & Worship •(Choir; Readers; Servers; cleaners) •Ministering to the Parish •Meals/ service/ prayer/ visitation •Charitable Outreach-hands on/international •Communication ministry -- web/ bulletin/ PR) •Bookstore | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Pre-school •Elementary level •Jr & Sr High School •Youth & teen group •Forms and Schedules | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Adult class •Fellow-ship events •Seasonal events •Men's Bible Study •Women's Group •Men's social group •FOCA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Inquirers Instruction (describe/ schedule) •Doctrine •Worship •Sacraments •Church •History •Prayer & fasting •Scripture •Links/ Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Contact info •Regular Schedule •Driving Directions •Contact form •Monthly calendar •Annual calendar •(overview) |

Audience Centric Menu Structure

**One possible menu layout
1st and 2nd level.**

These slides and an archive of this webinar will be available soon at :
<http://www.midwestdiocese.org/webinars.html>

Feel free to contact Joe Kormos at

513-683-1911

parishfacilitator@midwestdiocese.org

THE END

55

Appendix

Additional Slides

More Detail About Inquirers*

**An opinion offered by a friend – a limited summary*

56

| Group | Some <u>may</u> be searching for... | Probable hurdles... |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Roman Catholics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Vatican II Mass - sense of glory & transcendence of God. • married clergy better able to resist sexual temptations. • Possible doctrinal doubts: papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, & more | <p>All:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic concerns -- unwelcoming to “outsiders” • Services are conducted entirely or mostly in a foreign language. <p>Some liturgical Protestants & most Evangelicals... Above plus ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worship that is too “elaborate and showy,” • “idolatry” (veneration of icons & cross), • invocation of the Theotokos; saints • prayers for the dead, • doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist, • sign of the cross, • excessive authority vested in Bishops. <p>Above plus...unaccustomed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liturgical worship • Use of a church year. • Sacraments, Saints, Tradition is more than bible |
| Liturgical Protestants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life w/o praise bands” & “clown masses.” • Deeper spiritual life • Possible doctrinal doubts: “sola scriptura,” “faith alone,” “substitutionary atonement” | |
| Evangelical Protestants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beauty in worship (building/music) • More than popular entertainment or theological lecture • Deeper spiritual life • More than initial “decision for Christ.” • “authentic New Testament Christianity.” “rootedness” • Doctrinal doubts: “sola scriptura,” “eternal security,” “believers’ baptism,” | |

See also [Orthodox Convert Survey - Short Version](#)

What can you add?



A Decent Content Form

Source Forgotten!

57

Contact Us

I'm interested in the following:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Receiving New Member Information | <input type="checkbox"/> Joining the Parish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making a Donation | <input type="checkbox"/> Being added to the Email/Mailing list |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visit from Clergy | |

First Name *

Last Name **

Family Members

Address

Address 2

City

State

Zip

Email *

Home Phone

Mobile Phone

I'd like to receive information about:

Questions or Comments

Useful Background Documents

58

References – Diocese of Midwest

- ❑ [Mystery Worshipper Reports -](#)
- ❑ [Toward Better Parish Websites](#)
- ❑ [More Suggestions for Improved Parish Websites](#)
- ❑ [Improving Parish Bulletin Content](#)
- ❑ [Improving the Parish Bulletin Formatting](#)
- ❑ [Taking Parish Photos](#)
- ❑ [Recent Changes in the American Religious Landscape](#)
- ❑ [Orthodox Convert Survey - Short Version](#)

Content Sources

- ❑ [Inquirers Slide presentation](#) (offer as link)