



ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK
YOUTH FAITH FORMATION
Catechetical

A Catechetical Leader's Guide to Setting up a Website

The decision to set up and maintain a *website* for your faith formation program is a wise one. There is no doubt that so much of what people do today is online. A diverse set of activities happen online every day, banking, socializing, learning, communicating and recreating. As a way of reaching out to people where they are, why wouldn't a faith formation program have a website, too?



This guide has two assumptions. The first is absolutely important – that you have your pastor's "blessing." In order for any parish initiative to develop and flourish, the knowledge, approval and support of your pastor is crucial.

Technical words in *italics* are defined in the glossary at the end of this guide.

Your pastor may ask, "How much will it cost?" That's a good question because websites can be costly and each parish will have to consider the budget. You certainly may opt to engage the services of a web developer to create your site. However, there are free alternatives as well. Google sites, eCatholic, and WordPress are worth a look (see a list at the end of this guide).

Be aware that even a free website takes much time and effort, which is in itself a cost. Therefore, no website is "free."

The other assumption is that you are *not* a tech expert, but you are willing to put forth the effort to learn. If so, this guide will offer some tips to help make your website successful.

What do *I* need for a successful website?



You *do* need basic computer skills. Specifically, you need to be confident in using the computer and Internet. If you are proficient with a word processing program, like *MS Word*, and are competent with Internet basics, such as up/downloading, that's a good start.

You need the willingness to learn. As time goes on, you will be called to learn new ideas and techniques about the websites, the Internet and technology. At times, you may be stretched out of your comfort zone.

You need time. You will need to schedule time to invest in the website; time to learn, time to implement and time to update.

You need a plan. Planning is crucial to developing a website. A website is a project that should not be tackled with 100% enthusiasm and 10% foresight. Plan your website out. Although it is work, planning will help save you time and effort in the long run.

What does website planning involve?



Listening to people. Take the time and opportunity to speak with your pastor, catechists, staff and other stakeholders, to find out their needs and to solicit ideas.

Knowing your audience. Name the groups of people that you are trying to reach with your website. Is it the whole parish? The parish and community? Some subset in the parish? You may have several audiences. It is important to know to whom you are reaching out because this drives how you build your site and its content.

Considering your content. What content do you have that people need?

What kinds of information do people ask you for? Think about it. You have calendars, forms, applications, registrations, curriculum, and handbooks – there is much valuable information you can share.

Making an outline. Just like an architect uses blueprints, take the time to outline your website. Something like this would help:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Home Page | 2. Faith Formation Section |
| a. Mass times | a. Calendar |
| b. Directions | b. Forms |
| c. Pastor's <i>blog</i> | c. Registration |
| | d. Etc. |

Group like items together as much as possible. Continue to revise and update your outline as you plan.

Planning the site's navigation. The structure of the site, which includes the navigation (menus), design and copy, should help visitors find the answers to their questions easily. Use page titles, links and sub-headings to organize the content. Let the needs of your users be your guide.

What else should I consider?



Keep your website fresh. Make a plan to keep your website updated and determine who will be contributing to and making the actual updates to the website once it is launched. Someone should be willing to set aside a few hours (or more, if needed) on a regular basis to review and update the web pages. An outdated website gives the impression that you don't care about your online visitors. Make people feel welcome by updating weekly, if not more often. A website is never finished because a vibrant faith formation program will always need an up-to-date website. People expect a website to be new and fresh which gives them a reason to use it more often.

Create pages that look clean and organized. Stay away from cluttering your web pages. People do not need to be serenaded by music, bombarded by

images or pictures, or the gimmickry of special effects when people visit your site. Be selective and let simplicity of design guide you.

Examine your pictures

carefully. Don't use pictures that are of poor quality, out of focus, or are too dark/light. Show people who are happy and engaged in some activity. Such pictures are better than staged lineups, because they show that your parish is active. Showing is better than telling, so use the images to tell the story of what is going on.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, SR. MARY, FR. TOM SMITH, FRANK JONES, LARA NELSON, FRANK HAMMER, MSPR. CHARLES TIMLIN

Ask permission – thou shall not steal! Always ask permission to use someone's picture and give people a chance to opt-out. Never steal images from the web. If you need stock photos, then buy them from a reputable online website, or use a website that has a *creative commons* license (e.g. morguefile.com).

Consider people's needs. Make sure that your resources are able to be easily downloaded. Do not post *MSWord* documents because people may not be able to read it on their device. Rather use *PDF* format instead; it is a standard for sharing documents. Everyone cannot afford or may not be able to have MSWord on their device, but Adobe Reader is free. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat or another PDF converter, there are free ones on the Internet (e.g. www.nitroreader.com).

Consider evangelization. What about people who aren't in your parish? You may want to reach out to them, too, as they may be interested in a talk, prayer service or program that your parish is hosting. Use your website to introduce people to our Faith; lifelong Catholics need this, too! Use your website to evangelize, welcome, invite and teach.

Engage people. Invite people to interact with your website by asking them to fill out a form, give feedback, or upload pictures. You can poll people or ask them to register for a program or event. Use their input to update your website. Also, don't forget to link to interesting sites. See suggestions at the end of this guide. Or, do you own searches. Better yet, create your own

resources. Parishes have done creative things on the Internet to explain and promote the Faith.

Speak plainly and get to the point. Don't use more *church-ese* than needed. For example, don't call "mass times" "liturgical events" – they are, but your visitors may be just looking for the *mass* schedule. Don't bury information in paragraphs people may not want to read. The answers should be obvious and concise. Additional content can be provided, but let the visitor decide if he/she wants to read more by providing a link. Organize your website around the needs of your audience, not the structure of the parish or faith formation program. Also, don't forget to provide contact information with an email address in case people have questions.

Start small and build. Don't try to do everything at once with the website. Start small and build on it over time. In your website plan, plan out when parts of the website will go online. You may plan to have social media, or a section on RCIA, but perhaps that would be a project for 6 months from now rather than an immediate need. Prioritize your website components and implement them over time.

Promote your website. Make your website known in the parish by advertising it. Put it in the bulletin and on posters (preferably with a *QR code*). Don't expect everyone to get on board right away. Train people to go to the website by giving them links to the information they request. If there is content and up-to-date information, then over time they will begin to use it. As you train your constituents to go to the website, you will need to keep it updated and use it more and more for communication.

Final thoughts and resources



As you can see, a good website is a project that demands time, effort and planning. Good planning is essential in order to save time, effort and expense. Avail yourself of people who can advise you and give you a hand. You will most likely find that webmasters like to share their time, tips, tricks and experience.

Glossary

- **Blog:** short for “web log;” a website where a discussion is held between the writers of the site and those who read it.
- **Creative commons license:** gives the public permission to share and use creative work without copyright infringement.
- **MSWord:** one of various word processing programs people use on their computers.
- **PDF** (portable document format): standard for electronic document exchange.
- **QR code:** a graphical code, like a bar code (see example) which, when used with a Smartphone, can direct the user to a website or other online information.
- **Website:** one or more computerized pages connected to the Internet.



Example of a
QR Code

“Free Websites”

- **Google Sites:** see sites.google.com/
- **eCatholic:** free for parishes in the Archdiocese of New York; see www.ecatholicwebsites.com/
- **WordPress:** commonly used for blogs but makes a great website as well; see wordpress.com/
- **Parish bulletin companies** often offer free websites. Check with your company.

Websites with Suggested Links:

- **Catechetical Office Website:** www.nyfaithformation.org

- **Our Sunday Visitor:** http://www.osv.com/Portals/4/pdf/0615infocus_interactive.pdf
- **Catholic Apostolate Center:** <http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/>
- **USCCB:** <http://www.usccb.org/>

Further Reading

- **Web Sites Do-It-Yourself For Dummies:** <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/web-sites-doityourself-for-dummies-cheat-sheet0.html>
- **Half of All Catholics Have No Idea that their Church has any Internet Presence** <http://catholictechtalk.com/2013/09/23/half-of-all-catholics-have-no-idea-that-the-church-has-any-internet-presence/>
- **Website Traffic, Part I: Forethought is Best** <http://www.catholicwebsolutions.com/2012/01/24/website-traffic-forethought-is-best-part-i/>
- **Website Traffic, Part II: Interaction is Important** <http://www.catholicwebsolutions.com/2012/01/31/website-traffic-part-ii-interaction-is-important/>
- **Promoting Your Website – Bringing the Expertise and Gifts of Catholic Organizations to the Internet** <http://www.catholicwebsolutions.com/2012/02/07/website-traffic-part-iii-promoting-your-website/>