Improving Your Parish Website

- Topic Outline
  - Intro: Goals; Why Websites
  - Common Parish Website Mistakes (IMO!)
  - Understanding Your Audience
  - Telling Your Parish Story
  - Using Photos Well
  - A Website Outline

Joseph Kormos
Parish Development Ministry Leader
Diocese of Midwest
Orthodox Church in America
Registrant Profile

- 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.)
Housekeeping Items

- Control Panel
  - Hide if annoying!
- Mute Button
- Chat
- Ask questions via question facility
- Slides & archive recording available on line at [http://www.midwestdiocese.org/webinars.html](http://www.midwestdiocese.org/webinars.html)
- Chance of “Pilot Error” is high – bear with me!

You should now be able to hear the moderator!
Start Recording, Joe!
IMPROVING YOUR PARISH WEBSITE

Diocese of Midwest
Orthodox Church in America

September 15, 2011
Registrant Profile

- Parish Size – from 5 to greater than 500
- 25% Clergy
- About half are parish webmasters
  - Others: Priest, Parish council, Bulletin writer
- 60% asked for their site to be reviewed
- Areas of focus
  - 65% or more are involved with content.
  - 52% involved with technical (posting/design etc.)

Parish Background

- Episcopal: 2%
- Other Orthodox Jurisdictions: 18%
- Antiochian Archdiocese: 29%
- Other OCA: 31%
- OCA Midwest: 20%
Your Presenter: Joe Kormos

- 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 or graphics designer.
Goals

- **Inspire**
  - To strengthen your site

- **Offer**
  - Ideas & suggestions

- **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

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

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

The front door to your parish.
First impression!

- Inquirers make “taste and see” decisions based on the quality, content and “feel” of a parish website.
- They have been known to drive beyond a closer Orthodox parish to one that feels best based on the website.
The Jobs of Your Website

- 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

- **Switching**
  - 44% of Americans have switched religions.
  - Lapsed Catholics are third largest “religious body” in US.

- **Website more important for an Orthodox parish**
  - Orthodoxy not well known
    - Technology levels playing field
      - “Helps little guys look big”
  - High uniqueness
  - Inaccurate stereotypes
Common Website Mistakes

In My Opinion!
Common Website Mistakes (IMO!)

- Out of date info
- Important info left out/buried
- Text, text, text
  - 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!)

- Apologizing
- Parish history lessons
- Premature theology lessons
- Orthodox jargon
- Unwelcoming
  - Unduly formal
- 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
## An Audience/Communication Planning Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience/User</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Stereotypes to be Addressed</th>
<th>Key Points to Make</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orthodox</strong></td>
<td>Parish Veterans</td>
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<td>Parish newcomers</td>
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<td>Possible (in-bound) transfers <em>(new to town; switching parishes)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unchurched</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Either</strong></td>
<td>Visitors to events (weddings etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
User’s Key Questions

- **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**
  - 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 there? 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?
Understanding Your Audience(s)

- 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

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

Difficulties and Differences Experienced by Orthodox Converts in America

- Ethnic Qualities of Church/Parish: 41%
- Veneration of the Theotokos: 27%
- Complexity/Unfamiliarity with Liturgy: 25%
- Orthodox spiritual disciplines: 24%
- Icons: 18%
Consider Stereotypical Reactions

What might web visitors be assuming about your parish?

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

- Churches in General
  - Gossip
  - Judgmental
  - Empty
  - Too big
  - Closed
  - Old People

Often gracefully confronting wrong stereotypes can be important and helpful. How can a website help do that?
### More Detail about Inquirers*

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Some <strong>may be searching for…</strong></th>
<th>Probable hurdles…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roman Catholics</strong></td>
<td>• Pre-Vatican II Mass - sense of glory &amp; transcendence of God.</td>
<td>All:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• married clergy better able to resist sexual temptations.</td>
<td>• Ethnic concerns – Orthodox unwelcoming to “outsiders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Possible doctrinal doubts: papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, &amp; more</td>
<td>• services are conducted entirely or mostly in a foreign language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liturgical Protestants</strong></td>
<td>• No“praise bands” &amp; “clown masses.”</td>
<td>Some liturgical Protestants &amp; most Evangelicals…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deeper spiritual life</td>
<td>Above plus …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Possible doctrinal doubts: “sola scriptura,” “faith alone,” “substitutionary atonement”</td>
<td>• worship that is “elaborate and showy,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evangelical Protestants</strong></td>
<td>• Beauty in worship (building/music)</td>
<td>• “idolatry” (veneration of icons &amp; cross),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More than popular entertainment or theological lecture</td>
<td>• invocation of the Theotokos; saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deeper spiritual life</td>
<td>• prayers for the dead,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More than initial “decision for Christ.”</td>
<td>• doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “authentic New Testament Christianity.”</td>
<td>• sign of the cross,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “rootedness”</td>
<td>• excessive authority vested in Bishops.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Doctrinal doubts: “sola scriptura,” “eternal security,” “believers' baptism,”</td>
<td>Above plus…unaccustomed to:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of a church year.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sacraments, Saints, Tradition is more than bible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Telling Your Parish Story

A Few Key Communication Elements for Your Site
Communicating with Inquirers

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. Take a first step — visit, call, look around
   - Dispel fears; show uniqueness AND sameness
Personal Narratives

- ‘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 catholicism. I had spent 40+ years as an Anglo-Catholic Anglican. Although I remain close to both communions, and while both reflect positively certain elements of the undivided Church, only Holy Orthodoxy possesses the fullest vision of the Church founded by Christ. It has been said that the Church is the Truth of God in His Church. For me, this Truth was found by coming home to the true catholic Church which has sank the liturgy, the 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 and salvation by grace. I concluded that these traditions fell short of the full expression of the New Testament Church. Instead, I discovered surprise and satisfaction in the historic liturgy and organic continuity of the Orthodox Church. Now, nothing pleases my children more as we look forward to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ each Sunday at Holy Trinity parish.

“My conversion to Orthodoxy was not based on emotional or social needs but rather a hunger for the Truth. Having been Catholic for some years, I felt disillusioned and discouraged because the faiths that I had been taught were unsustainable and contrary to the Truth. This ‘hunger’ found its satisfaction in the Orthodox Church. I no longer view my own sacred Scriptures, for I believe them to be justly criticized by the Church of Orthodoxy. The life of the Church is the Church of Orthodoxy. It is the true Church of Orthodoxy which is the very life of the soul...” -- Paul

Sally Smith
Westhaven WI

Sally has been attending St. XXX for five years, having been raised in an Orthodox parish.

Why St. XXXX is My Home Parish:
St. XXXX is simply an exciting spiritual home. It provides a link to the church of my youth while offering a sense of mission and community. We’re truly bringing the Orthodox faith to all people.
Important Info - Often Missing

- Priest photo and greeting
- Empty calendar
- Parish overview
  - Who we are, what we value
  - An extended welcome greeting – putting best foot forward
- When and where
- Xpressway accessibility
- Parking
- "English language"
- Service descriptions
- Ministry info
- Membership/ Stewardship info
- Bookstore
- Reading List

Empty calendar
Important Info

Often Missing or Hard to Find

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

- 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….
Beware of Adjectives

☐ Bragging?

“... 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

“small but...”

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.”
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Using Photos Well

But first... questions?
Using Photos Well

- 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

- 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 “photos” page!

Read “Taking Parish Photos”
Using Photos Well

- Use active/action shots when possible

Good

Better

Even Better
Using Photos Well

- 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

- Avoid showing an empty church
Children, Families People

Needed Parish Photos

- Multiple age groups
- Different demographics
- Smiling, hugging
- Learning Praying, Singing
Needed Parish Photos

Using Photos Well

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

Needed Parish Photos

- 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)
Temple

Needed Parish Photos

Probably not this >>>>

but rather this >>>>

(same church)
Worship

Needed Parish Photos

Improving Your Parish Website 9/15/2011
Worship

Needed Parish Photos

- 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 (dark church)
  - 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

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

Needed Parish Photos

- 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

Needed Parish Photos
Ministry

Needed Parish Photos

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

Decorating
Charitable Service
Youth
Community

Needed Parish Photos

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

Parish Family

College Group

Communal Meal

Men! In Church! Smiling!

Social Event
Parish History

Needed Parish Photos

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

- **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

- **Collect info; get photos**

- **Get going…**

- **Test it!**
Sample Parish Website Outline
Welcome from Father Thomas

Relevant photo

Relevant photo

News

News

News

Schedule

Contact Us

Photos shuffle regularly
In each frame
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Home page</strong></th>
<th><strong>Our Parish</strong></th>
<th><strong>Music and Worship</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ministry &amp; Outreach</strong></th>
<th><strong>Children &amp; Youth</strong></th>
<th><strong>Adults</strong></th>
<th><strong>Inquirers</strong></th>
<th><strong>Info</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Rector’s greeting (written &amp; video)</td>
<td>Worship schedule</td>
<td>Pastoral care</td>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>Adult class</td>
<td>Inquirers Instruction (describe/schedule)</td>
<td>Contact info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main News items</td>
<td>Parish Vision</td>
<td>Service order (link to OCA site)</td>
<td>Music &amp; Worship</td>
<td>Elementary level</td>
<td>Fellow-ship events</td>
<td>Doctrine</td>
<td>Regular Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar</td>
<td>Clergy &amp; Staff</td>
<td>Annual / Daily weekly/ Lenten cycle</td>
<td>(Choir; Readers; Servers; cleaners)</td>
<td>Jr &amp; Sr High School</td>
<td>Seasonal events</td>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Driving Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Links</td>
<td>Parish leadership / Council</td>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>Ministering to the Parish</td>
<td>Youth &amp; teen group</td>
<td>Men’s Bible Study</td>
<td>Sacraments</td>
<td>Contact form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Schedule</td>
<td>FAQ</td>
<td>Readers</td>
<td>Meals/ service/ prayer/ visitation</td>
<td>Forms and Schedules</td>
<td>Women’s Group</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Monthly calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>Becoming a member</td>
<td>Altar and Decorating</td>
<td>Charitable Outreach-hands on/international</td>
<td></td>
<td>Men’s social group</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Annual calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletins</td>
<td>Stewardship &amp; Pledging</td>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>Communication ministry</td>
<td></td>
<td>FOCA</td>
<td>Prayer &amp; fasting</td>
<td>(overview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact info</td>
<td>Church History &amp; Visual Tour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OCA/ Diocese of Midwest/ Parish documents (password)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Links/Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Thank You for Your Attention
Contact Us

I'm interested in the following:

- [ ] Receiving New Member Information
- [ ] Making a Donation
- [ ] Visit from Clergy
- [ ] Joining the Parish
- [ ] Being added to the Email/Mailing list

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

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)
We invite you to join our parish family as we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word. Come feel a part of the family as we sing our praises, listen to the Word and go out into the neighborhood to share our joy. St. Peter’s is warm and welcoming... active and involved. We provide a wide variety of ministries for you to explore. Be a vibrant member of your community, your family and your parish!
Websites

- Episcopalian Chicago
- Columbus
- HT KC
- Holy Apostles Bloomington Normal
- St Michael’s Louisville
- Overland Park
- Cincinnati
- Antiochian Boston
Many of the previously mentioned common mistakes are traceable to not identifying and defining/understanding your audience.

Decide on target
- Internal
- External
What are the experiences of a non–Orthodox visitor to our parish?

- What might they find odd, unusual or disorienting?
- What would they find illuminating, enlivening and distinctive?
Evangelization Cycle

- **Identify**
  - Locate individual receptive persons and pockets of persons who represent areas of greatest potency for our parish’s evangelization initiative.

- **Inform**
  - Build awareness, trust, curiosity and openness.

- **Invite**
  - Invite those with curiosity and receptivity to come and see. Welcome and receive them with warmth.

- **Nurture**
  - Follow up carefully and honestly to grow interest in and excitement for the faith. Help them to explore what the Church offers and to identify if they truly seek it. Encourage participation as appropriate in services and events.

- **Instruct**
  - Guide potential new members to catechetical programs, scripture studies or other paths of entry through parish groups.

- **Incorporate**
  - Involve or include in a role, task or group after uniting them with the church.

- **Inspire**
  - Encourage them to begin the cycle anew by evangelizing the active – to renew their commitment to Christ; the inactive – to heat up those only minimally involved; and the unchurched-to share the light of Christ with all.
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