



The Importance of a Website

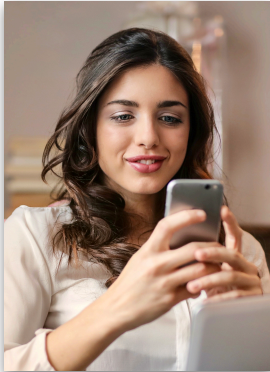
Part One: Pointing People to the Miniature Paradise in their Midst

On February 27, 1885, Walther opened his evening lecture to his students at Concordia Seminary with these words: “When a Lutheran candidate of theology is assigned to a parish where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran preacher, for him that place ought to be to the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert—for him that place should be a miniature paradise. Do not the blessed angels descend from heaven with great joy whenever the Father in heaven sends them to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation?”

The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, CPH

That second last sentence of that paragraph above describes well the vast variety of locations of our English District missions and churches. Some of our congregations are quite large and well-furnished, others are small and meet in very meagre settings. What they all have in common is that in this place we are blessed to hear God’s Word. In this place we hear God’s own absolution on Sunday mornings, rejoice in the grace He has poured out upon us in our Baptism, and receive the body and blood of our Savior for the forgiveness of our sins. From this place we reach out and witness to the community in which we live. What greater place on earth can there be?

So, how do we go about letting folks know about such a great place? At one time, the steeple was one of the tallest points in town and could be seen easily from all directions. Those days are gone. At one time the Yellow Pages helped people to locate your church. Those days are also behind us.



Today, it’s likely that many of your guests have already visited your congregation’s website before they come in your front door. According to a Lifeway Research study, “Seven out of ten guests will go to a church website as a determinative factor in where they will choose to visit.” This provides all of our congregations, from large churches to new mission starts, with a tremendous opportunity that’s too good to overlook.

The great news is that with today’s site building software, web designs and templates, a congregation can create its own modern, professional-looking website with little to no technical knowledge. Compared to phone book directories, and display ads in print media, this means of advertising easily provides the biggest bang for the buck. It’s a means by which we can point our neighbors to the Good News of salvation in Christ. It’s a great way to let them know where they can find this “miniature paradise” in their midst where it’s proclaimed – your church.



Creating, or Updating, a Website What Kinds of Things Can You Include?



Creating a Church Web Site is now easier than ever. When it comes to building a website, you don't need to know how to code. With "drop and drag" site building software, and well-designed templates, all you need is a little imagination and some free time. You can make your site as simple or as complex as you would like. You can have a new site up and running in the same day.

Having a website is not something simply for larger churches. They also provide one of the most affordable and versatile means of advertising for a new start in a storefront, a small church or a mission.


Website building sites such as [Wix](#), [Weebly](#), [Wordpress](#) and [Squarespace](#) now allow you to create your own professional and user-friendly websites in a matter of minutes. These are some of the largest. There are also a variety of others. Concordia Publishing House also offers its own site builder service through its [Concordia Technology Solutions](#). (Discounts apply for Church360° Members customers and supported Shepherd's Staff customers.)

You can make a site on many of these platforms that may cost you nothing but you often get what you paid for. Free sites often come with ads and include their name in your website address. It's worth getting a paid package. You can check out the price plans here for [Wix](#), [Weebly](#), [Wordpress](#), [Squarespace](#) and [Concordia Technology Solution's Church360 Unite](#). In many cases, you can get a professional-looking site, that can be seen around the world, for the same monthly price as ordering a pizza!



When it comes to creating a new website Mike Renneker, who created a stunning and user-friendly website for Sherman Oaks Lutheran Church in Sherman Oaks, California, says it best: "I think any church can have a great website with the right tools. Ours was done using wix.com but there are several 'do it yourself' web design platforms out there as I'm sure you're aware. I just started with one of their templates and added our own content. Also studied other church websites to get ideas of what to do and what not to do." Here's the best way to get ideas for creating, and refreshing, your site. Spend some time looking at some of the websites of our sister congregations.

What kinds of things will you want to include on your site? Begin with everything you already include on your church brochure: your church's name, service times, address, directions and contact information. In addition, consider ...



Pictures of your church
(Surprisingly, this often gets forgotten)

- Outside pictures of your building on a sunny day for guests to spot your church.
- Inside pictures for a glimpse of what visitors will see when they enter your doors.
- Pictures with smiling people and activities.

The online company [Etsy](#) describes how important pictures are to customers. Imagine how important pictures are for folks who are curious about your church.

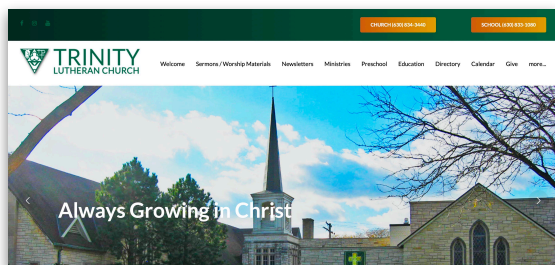
- What Lutherans believe – we have a great message to share!
(We will have much more in the next issue.)
- A map (There are still those who don't trust GPS) Embedding a map from [Google Maps](#) is a free and handy way to help visitors find directions to your location.
- Links to your church's social media and service videos.
- A calendar of events with regularly updated information. You can even send out [Calendar Invites](#) with Google Calendar, Apple Calendar and Outlook.
- A clean and crisp copy of our LCMS logo on your site. You can download crisp images in a variety of formats from the [LCMS Brand and Logo Center](#).
- While online photo resource collections will rarely have church and worship pictures that reflect our focus on Word and Sacrament ministry, you can find these available for download at [LCMS Photo & Graphics Archives](#).



From The Field

From our Pastors and Congregations

Our English District is blessed with some of the best congregational websites in the Synod. Here is a just a small sample of what's out there.



Take a tour of the terrific site for [Trinity Lutheran Church](#) in Villa Park, Illinois. It gives a welcome look at their pastor and people, buildings and programs.

What's a good domain name (your church's website address)? Try using something easy to remember like your church name and city. A good example is Our Savior Lutheran Church in Hartland, Michigan. They have an easy-to-remember domain name (oursaviorhartland.org) They also have a great website!



[Sherman Oaks Lutheran Church](#) in Sherman Oaks, California has a crisp and modern look that's outstanding. Look what can be created with a modern website builder.

[Prince of Peace Lutheran Church](#) in Mesquite, Nevada has made a point of showing God's people. Just take a look at those faces and especially the smiling face of their pastor. It makes you wish you lived right down the street.



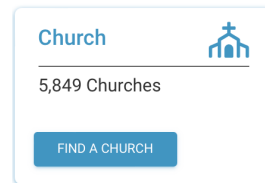
Here's a nice example of an easy to follow layout. Have a look at the wonderful website of the [Lutheran Church of the Shepherd King](#) in West Bloomfield, Michigan.

We will include more sample websites in the upcoming issue, "The Importance of a Website: Part Two."

Toolbox

Ideas, Suggestions and Handy Bits

- Submit your church's new, or updated, website address to our [English District Office](#) for inclusion in the *Churches* section of our District web site.
- Submit your church's website address to the LCMS for inclusion in the *Find A Church* section of our Synodical web site. Your church's website information can be added, or updated, in the *congregation profile* section when the pastor or secretary logs in to [LCMS Information Support Network for Congregations](#). If you need login information to access the church profile, you may call the [LCMS Church Information Center](#) at 888-843-5267 to receive it.



Having your church website listed on both of the above will help you to be found by LCMS members who travel or are thinking of moving to your area. Lori Horn notes, in her [Concordia Technology Solutions blog](#), "You'd like to think that if there is no website listed, people would pick up the phone and call, but most people just don't do that. They look for the next church with a website that will tell them what to expect on Sunday morning."

Having your link listed on other websites is an important factor in the ranking system for search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo. This will cause your website to appear earlier in the search results and make your site easier for visitors to find your church.

- Check whether your town or city's chamber of commerce has a church listing page on its website. For example, [Christ The King Lutheran Church](#) in Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan has its site listed with a link on the [Grosse Pointe Woods Chamber of Commerce](#) site. Your Chamber of Commerce site is another good place for new families moving into the area to find your church.

Our Synod and District Programs

Materials and Workshops Available For You
(Do you have a workshop scheduled? Let us know.)



Young or old, small or large, rural or urban, your congregation is vital — it has life. There is vitality wherever God's Word is proclaimed in purity and the Lord's Sacraments are rightly administered. This Christ-centered vitality is the focus of re:Vitality, a suite of resources developed by the Office of National Mission to help you equip your congregation for carrying out God's mission in your context.

The re:Vitality suite of resources includes practical and productive workshops that address serving your inactive members ([Shepherding Our Strays](#)), consensus-based strategic planning for your congregation ([Serving in God's Mission](#)), and how to share the Gospel with your community through effective outreach ([Connect To Disciple](#)).



re:Vitality resources are available to LCMS congregations
at no cost
from the Office of National Mission.

For more information contact
[Rev. Derek Mathers](#)
our Mission Executive & Assistant to the Bishop
or [Rev. Mark Wood](#)
LCMS Managing Director Church Planting, Renewal and Support

Next Month

- The Importance of a Website (Part Two)

A look at some of the many different ways you can use your site to share the Good News ... and upgrade your site's performance.

Previous Topics

- [Outstanding In Your Field](#)
- [Fall Festivals, Street Fairs and Parades](#)
- [Outreach to Our Military](#)

Coming Topics

- Inviting Traveling Teams
- Podcasting, Easy and Cheap
- Lawn Displays and Signs
- News Releases instead of Ads ... and much more

Articles, Books and Research

Current Research and Writings



In this report Barna Research shares both startling and encouraging statistics when it comes to how confident congregations feel about sharing their faith. You can read it [here](#). Hats off to Fred Reaman for passing it along.

Surprisingly, there remains pushback when it comes to having our worship services available online. What if our members decide to watch the service at home instead of coming to church? There's good news on this front. A [Pew Research Report](#) from last June notes, "Online Religious Services Appeal to Many Americans, but Going in Person Remains More Popular."

It will take patience to remind folks of Hebrews 10:25, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV 84). At the same time, consider your shut-in members who are physically incapable of coming in person. These services, along with regular home visits and communion with their pastor, are a remarkable blessing.



Please Contact

[Pastor David Tannahill](#)
of our Evangelism Team with your ideas and input.

Share details of what has worked for you for upcoming editions.