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# Church Websites 101





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Since 1992, Faithlife Corporation (formerly Logos Bible Software) has grown from a couple of programmers in a basement into the largest developer of Bible study software and a worldwide leader in multilingual electronic publishing. We partner with more than 500 publishers to make more than 120,000 Bible study resources available to customers around the world.

Innovation is key to Faithlife's growth. In the last few years, we've expanded from our flagship software product, Logos Bible Software, to a variety of tools to complement your faith and Bible study experience. In June of 2011, we launched Faithlife Ebooks, a Christian ebook store and ereader app. In 2012, we released Faithlife Proclaim Church Presentation Software along with the Faithlife Study Bible and Faithlife.com, a social network that allows Christians from all over the world to connect and share ideas online.

Most recently, we've launched an entire suite of church administrative tools including Faithlife Sites, Faithlife Sermons, Faithlife TV, Faithlife Giving, and more! And we're still just getting started.



## About This Guide

If you're out to build or revise your church website, it's because you care about reaching more people for Christ. And if you don't have a website at all, we hope this guide starts you off in the right direction.

What you're about to read will guide you in laying the right foundation and following the most basic, best practices for church websites.

There's plenty to learn about building church websites, but first things first: the essentials. That's what this guide sticks to. Mercifully short but extremely important, what follows is the least you need to know about church websites.

Happy reading!

## Part 1

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# Why Have a Church Website in the First Place?

If you're reading this, you're likely already convinced: you need a church website. But have you thought about why? Do you know where websites fit in your evangelism funnel and how best to use your website in your overall engagement strategy?

Below, we'll discuss the three basic reasons you need a church website. Even if you already know them, these foundational principles determine how to build an effective church website.

### **Church websites make the first impression**

Before visitors set foot through the front doors of your church, there's a good chance they've already engaged or tried to engage with your church online. And the reality is the information that was or wasn't available to them has already made an impression. Did you know [over 17 million](#) non-churchgoers check out church websites every year? That's a lot of souls, some of them searching for a place to call home and a community to call their own.

Take a quick minute to google churches in your area, and open a few of the results. Go ahead and try right now. What impressions did you have before you even read a word? You might have caught yourself making assumptions about which churches are more established or relevant simply based on how their sites look and feel. Keep in mind, this is what most people do. We form impressions before we even know we've formed impressions,

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and understanding this human behavior is important as we think about the gut instincts we're inspiring with each of the touchpoints people have with our church.

Now, you and I both know a local church can be a faithful church with or without a pretty website. And some of the most powerful gatherings of the saints throughout history happened before the internet existed at all.

But we're now past the point where a church website is simply nice to have. It's now an expectation in our culture, just like it was expected you'd be in the phone book back when the phone book was how to get found. Your church website is the modern equivalent of being listed. And not having a website communicates a lack of care for those who are looking and hoping to find a church like yours.

But it's important to go a step beyond simply having a website. Some of you have websites that look like 1997, and you know it. That's why it must be said: the design of your church website matters, too. It's important for your site to be up to date, well-designed, mobile-responsive, and easy to navigate.

Thankfully, it's much easier to spin up church websites now than it was in 1997. And honestly, if the last time you gave it a go was in the '90s, you're going to be pleasantly surprised by how easy it has become to build a beautiful, mobile-responsive website. And it won't break the bank, either. [Some services](#) even offer great designs for free.

In our day and age, a well-designed website communicates a certain responsibility and care, and it forms an impression that the church takes itself seriously. Going back to those gut reactions we talked about earlier, a well-made church website helps visitors subliminally think, "This church cares about excellence. I bet they care about doing ministry well, too."

A church might be the most loving, warm, gospel-preaching church in town. But if the website turns people off from visiting the church, then that warmth and truth misses out on an opportunity to bless someone.

Your church's website is your church's first impression. What does it say about you?

### **Church websites inform visitors**

Once the first impression is made, your church website is still responsible for the second, third, and fourth impressions, too.

People will poke around while they're making up their mind about where they want to plant themselves for the long haul.

They'll look at your beliefs page. They'll look at your staff page. They'll look to see if you have a ministry for children or youth. They'll check out your small groups. They'll try to find sermons to watch or listen to. And they'll check out your social sites.

In short, they will try to form an impression of your church as best they can in just a few minutes. And this is why it's so important to think about the pathway you want new visitors to experience when they land on your site for the first time. It's not too much to have an entire section dedicated to first-time visitors. In fact, we highly recommend it!

It's critical you make this a helpful and seamless process for them. At the very least, highlight:

- Your church's service time(s), including approximate end time
  - Your church's location(s), including info about parking or public transit
  - Details necessary for planning, like whether you offer childcare or how people at your church tend to dress (visitors don't like to stick out)
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- **Bonus:** If you livestream your service, make sure you provide a way for visitors to view a livestream or video experience. Many first-time visitors attend via livestream before they ever walk through the front doors of the church.

A word on directions: in the age of Google Maps, it may seem unnecessary to provide specific directions, but there are still plenty of people who are uncomfortable with technology. To ensure you don't unwittingly exclude anyone, provide written directions to your church from the general regions people could travel from. A lot of church websites have a function where visitors can get directions texted to their phone, which is a nice way of going the extra mile to be inviting.

Lastly, make it easy to get in touch. Make sure this information is easy to find and covers the basics:

- Church phone number
- Email address
- Physical address
- Links to your church's Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram pages/profiles

Some churches are careful about gating contact information—for example, only providing a general address to the public, versus the pastor's personal email address. However you want to do it, make sure a responsive, friendly person is available to answer visitors' questions.

### **Church websites can help drive engagement**

Let's talk for a second about the evangelism funnel mentioned in the beginning. When planning your website, it's important to have a good understanding of the journey you'd like people to take as they become regular, committed members of your community.



Just like in marketing or sales, the church has an evangelism funnel, and in the church, we're looking to move strangers to active participants to committed members to evangelists. It's a journey, and all of the interactions and touchpoints we create should help people take the next step as they deepen their relationship with Jesus and the church community.

The website is often one of the first touchpoints people interact with. Social media is another. But over time, we're going to want to move those people to some sort of internal communication hub.

Faithlife is a great internal hub for churches, and it comes with lots of ready-to-use engagement tools. Some churches use Facebook groups. Some use Google groups. And other larger churches might choose to go with a custom church app. Whatever you choose, make sure you've put together a strong engagement plan and know which things you want available on your website and which you'd prefer to store in a more private location for your community. The best choice for a system is the one you know you'll keep up with. Your engagement and nurture plan is dependent upon you building a system you'll actually consistently use.

That said, the website will continue to be a tool you use to drive engagement over time, and it's a tool you can train your community to use when inviting new people to your church. A good outreach strategy, for example, might involve a strong blogging program and members who are willing to share those posts outward to their communities. Another good outreach strategy might involve a series of events designed for new people who are at the very top of the funnel. These sorts of things should always live on your website and be shared by your congregants to drive engagement and attract new visitors.

Take a minute to think about where you want the following items to live and how you're going to manage the upkeep (keep in mind, they can live in multiple places):

- New Visitor Info
- Connect Cards
- Sermon/Podcast Archives
- Giving
- Community Engagement
- Prayer Requests
- Member Directory
- Events/Calendar

Got it? Great. Let's move on to best practices.



# 3 Rules the Best Church Websites Follow

Whether you're building a church website for the first time or updating it for the tenth time, you might feel in over your head. There is a lot to keep in mind when it comes to building a truly great church website.

But for now, focus on three big-picture guidelines, and you'll be much closer to a church website that's welcoming to visitors, helpful for members, and true to your church.

## 1. Know your audience

While churches should be a welcoming place for anyone, each individual church is uniquely equipped to serve certain groups of people best. If you live in a college town, you're probably called to minister to skeptical professors and searching students. If you live in rural America, you're probably not called to serve inner city youth, first and foremost. Think about the demographics of the people who are already in your church and the unique situation you've been placed in. Think about the city you live in, the reasons people live there, and the special gifts and talents your church has been blessed with.

This will inform your list of who you're uniquely equipped to serve most immediately.

Now, take that list and bucket them into two or three main groups. Those are going to be your "persona buckets." A persona is a fictional representa-

tion of your ideal target audience, and having personas is a great way to focus and refine your core messages. If one were going to build personas for a college town, he could go with Skeptical Sam and College Cora. Skeptical Sam would be representative of any local college student who is skeptical about Christianity. Events and entire engagement campaigns could be built around Sam.

College Cora might represent any college student who was raised a Christian but who has recently moved to a new city to attend university. Maybe she hasn't found a church yet. Maybe she's allowed new things to take priority over church. Maybe Skeptical Sam has gotten into Cora's head. College Cora needs you to find her and help her get plugged in. You can build events and engagement campaigns around her needs, too.

Maybe your third persona bucket for this church would be Townie Thom or Townie Tara. This persona has lived in the town his entire life and needs to expand his horizons a bit. Townie Thom is going to be a key part of your evangelism strategy to Skeptical Sam and College Cora. So you'll need messaging for him, too. He needs to be sold out on your church's mission and vision to reach this city for Christ.

Think about your three target personas and build messaging for each one. Make sure your website speaks directly to these people and has messaging designed to engage them.

## **2. Make key information visible**

Now that you've determined your audience, try to get into the mind of the people visiting your website and ask, "What am I looking for?"

The best church websites make key information easy to find without overloading a visitor with too much too soon. It's all about balance—and menus.

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There's no one way to organize a church website menu, but generally visitors are looking for pages like:

- About Us
    - Including Leadership, Contact, What We Believe, and Mission and Values pages
  - Visit
    - Including details about service times, locations, and expectations
    - **Pro tip:** Have service times and locations on your Home Page with a link to your Visit page.
  - Ministries
    - **Pro tip:** In the items under this menu option, use general terminology like “High school” or “Young adult” rather than a special youth group name like “Ignite.”
  - Getting Involved
    - Including details about membership, baptism, small groups, volunteering, and joining the church’s email list
    - **Note:** This is slightly different from Ministries, in that it represents first steps someone might take to put down roots. Some churches call this page “Start Here” and include a brief welcome letter from the head pastor or elders.
  - Events
    - Including calendars, forms to RSVP or register, and FAQs about events
  - Resources
    - Including sermons, podcasts, recommended reading, and study guides
  - Giving
    - Including a link or form for online giving
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- **Pro tip:** Ideally, your giving solution is in the same platform as your website and church management software, like Faithlife Giving is. It's more convenient for members, makes them feel safer to give, and saves your church money by removing a middle man.

Menus are essential because they make it easy to browse or find specific information. When visitors peruse a church website, they're asking specific questions, and they're looking to menus for answers:

- **When and where does this church meet? (Visit)**
- **Does this church have ministries for my children or teens? (Ministries)**
- **What are their doctrinal beliefs? (What We Believe)**
- **Who are the pastors at this church? (About Us)**
- **How could I get involved in this church? (Getting Involved)**

Give careful thought to organization, and the right information will be easy to find. And remember: people skim sites, so use headlines and keep body copy brief.



### 3. Use simple language

The best church websites use simple, hype-free, factual language. One way to do this is to pretend that with every word you write, you're speaking to your unchurched neighbor.

The great advertiser David Ogilvy suggests something similar. Paraphrasing him with specific references to church:

When you sit down to write your [church website], pretend that you are talking to the woman on your right at a dinner party. She has asked you, "I am thinking of [attending a new church]. Which would you recommend?" Write your copy as if you were answering that question.

(1) Don't beat about the bush—go straight to the point. Avoid analogies of the "just as, so too" variety.

(2) Avoid superlatives, generalizations, and platitudes. Be specific and factual. Be enthusiastic, friendly, and memorable. Don't be a bore. Tell the truth, but make the truth fascinating.

Speaking plainly will disarm whoever comes to your website. They'll trust you more than if you used language that feels salesy or over the top.

The truth is, God is already doing great work in your church. Tell that story on your church website and invite others to be a part of it.



## Next Steps

Now that you've got personas, messaging, and a clear menu structure for your site, it's time to get to the building part. There are a lot of great resources out there, but we obviously recommend our own: [Faithlife Sites](#). We offer completely free, beautiful church websites with easy setup. You don't pay a dime unless you'd like your own custom URL, and you could be live in under an hour. Can't beat that. [Give it a try today](#).



**To learn more or to schedule a demo,  
visit us online at [Faithlife.com](https://Faithlife.com).**

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