

Parish Website Diocesan Guidelines (updated Sept 2012)

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1. Website Planning – some tips

Before designing your website it is helpful to consider:

- Who is your target audience? (eg churchgoing Catholics in your parish, inactive Catholics in your parish, anyone interested in finding out more about your parish and Faith etc)
- What would the target audience want to know?
- What style of presentation would be useful?
- How will the website fit in with other means of communication in your parish? (eg bulletin)
- Who will keep it up-to-date?
- How can you improve communications by adding email links or forms?
- Are you going to use an agency or will a parish group or parishioner design and develop your website as a ministry?

2. Usability and Accessibility issues

Accessibility is a legal requirement for all UK websites offering any form of service. This includes church and parish websites.

Some simple steps should be taken to be seen to be aiding accessibility and usability – in particular:

- Give alt tags for images if possible
- Language: Most web users scan rather than read content. Use the simplest and clearest language appropriate for a site's content.
- Try to provide alternative content if using Flash
- Try to check your website works on other platforms – eg Smartphones, Tablets

3. Copyright

- Ensure you have license/permission for ALL images you use. Do not copy images from another website.
- Do not hotlink¹ to images on other sites as this is stealing the bandwidth of other sites.

¹ link to another websites' image source directly

- Do not copy text from another website (even the diocesan website) and use it for your own² (other than short quotes). It is an infringement of copyright. Also both your site and the website you are copying from could be penalized in Google ranking.
- Do not make available or stream music or other audio on your website unless you have the appropriate permissions/licenses.

4. Security

If you use guestbooks, forums or any form of user interaction please ensure comments or other form of feedback are approved by the parish webmaster or designated person in the Parish before they are allowed to appear live on the website.

5. Data Protection and Cookies

It is potentially against the Data Protection Act 1984 to publish parish rotas or any other parish list with full names on the internet as the people named could be identifiable, and there are other possible security issues here.

So if a parish wishes to post full name rotas on the internet it is important that they have specific permission from the people on the rota first, or they use password protected pages.

Parish websites should comply with EU cookie law regulations (available at the Information Commissioner's Office www.ico.gov.uk).

Cookies are small text files that are placed on people's computers by websites that they visit. They are widely used in order to make websites work, or work more efficiently.

If you are using cookies for your parish website then you need to obtain consent (implied or otherwise) as explained at www.ico.gov.uk.

6. Child Protection

No photos of identifiable young people under 18 should be used on the website unless written parental permission has been given.

No names of young people under 18 should be used on the website next to photos.³

Do not allow young people under the age of 18 to make the parish website.

7. Publishing weekly bulletins on the Internet

If material from bulletins is reproduced on the website then a sensitivity to the appropriateness of the information is needed, and content displayed needs to be agreed with the priest in charge of the Parish. In particular see notes about Parish Rotas above.

² Unless the site intends to provide such content, eg a press release

³ Eg A Caption of "Our Parish is delighted to celebrate the First Holy Communion of one of our younger members" plus photo (assuming parental permission has been given for use of photo) is OK but "Mary Jane Jones, from Year 4 at St Paul's School makes her First Holy Communion" is NOT.

8. Overall Control

The Parish Priest or Priest in Charge of the Parish is responsible for the structure and content of the website. Although he will normally delegate the role of webmaster he must have a copy of the access codes⁴ and all of the details connected with the hosting. It is essential that the Priest is fully informed of the content of the website and must approve amendments to the structure and nature of the information displayed. There must be a regular review of the website by someone unconnected with the webmaster. The Parish Priest or his nominee should act as the reviewer.

9. Officially recognised parish websites

The Directors of the Diocese are liable for the actions of its parishes and therefore Directors need to ensure that at a minimum the guidelines given here are adhered to. If a parish website is officially recognised as representing the parish, then it will be checked by the Diocese regularly. Notice may be given by the Diocesan Webmaster to remove immediately all information deemed inappropriate. Appeal against such a Notice may be made in writing directly to the Diocesan Board of Directors c/o Bishop's Secretary, Bishop's House.
All official parish websites can be accessed via a link on the diocesan website.

⁴ username, password, ftp details