What Makes a Good Parish Website?

Design

The website must be pleasing to the eye (just like the Church should be). An ugly website that looks like it was created in Microsoft Frontpage doesn't attract or hold our attention. It must follow the simple principles of design: colour, appropriate use of negative space, a common theme, and good font choices. All are important.

Design also means the site is **easy to navigate**. It should have only a few main navigational options, and shouldn't be jumbled with a boatload of information on every page — and most especially the home page.

Organisation

Know your audience. What is the most important information for those coming to your website? Are you targeting your parishioners, or visitors, or both? Do you use language that only 'church people' understand?

Too many parish websites start with a silly 'splash' page that takes a long time to load, looks stupid, and wastes my time. Give me the parish page by default.

There are a few things which, in my mind, must be one every parish website's home page:

1. A good quality picture that captures the parish. Don't make it huge or too overbearing, but incorporate it in the design. Remember the church is more than an empty building.
2. Something that describes where the parish is located (in which Archdiocese/Diocese).
3. Sunday Mass Times (every visitor needs to know this). Don't put ALL your Mass times - instead, put Sunday times, then a link to more Mass and Sacrament information.
4. Contact information (email, phone, fax, street address).
5. Links (part of a well-designed navigation area) to:

   a. Calendar of Events
   b. Information about parish staff
   c. Parish History (desirable)
   d. Parish Organisations or Groups
   e. Parish News /Pastor's Blog (Not a copy and paste of the homily… real news, please! You can also offer reflections, but save the homily for Mass)

Then, if your parish wants, you can add in the following to the mix:

- Parish forums and/or bulletin boards (each parishioner could get a login)
- Parish Bulletin (although the Parish news section should incorporate these items)
- Schedule for ministers/ministries
- Blogs, Podcasts, and Video Podcasts (especially relating to RCIA)
- Photo galleries (either built into the site, or via a service like Flickr/Picasa)

Technology/Back-End

It is a minimum requirement that the site run on a CMS [Content Management System]. Wordpress is good for something relatively basic, and Joomla for everything else, allowing for an online community that's plays off of the physical, real community inside the Church.

Most parishes (if not all) don't need a dedicated server for this stuff. There are many companies that provide web hosting; the needs of most parishes are very basic. Hosts in the US are often cheaper, but true Australian hosts will provide better support in our time zone.

Rate Your Church Website

#	Criteria	Points	Your Score
1	Someone clearly has in their job description the responsibility for maintaining your website	+30	
2	Mass times clearly listed on the Home Page	+20	
3	Church phone number clearly listed on the Home Page	+20	
4	Contact Us form or clickable church email address clearly listed	+10	
5	Map or directions to the church can be found within 2 clicks from the home page	+10	
6	Current copy of the bulletin available for viewing or download	+10	
7	Welcome message from Pastor	+10	
8a	Staff Listing updated with current contact information	+10	
8b	Staff Listing exists but is out of date (at least one person's info is wrong)	-10	
9a	Calendar of events exists and current (at least one event +/- 30 days)	+10	
9b	Calendar of events exists but not current (no events +/- 30 days)	-10	
10a	News or Blog section exists and current (at least one entry +/- 30 days)	+10	
10b	News or Blog section exists but not current (no entries +/- 30 days)	-10	
11a	High quality, warm & inviting graphics or video used on Home Page	+10	
11b	Low resolution graphics or video used on Home Page	-10	
12	Liturgical Ministries page(s) with descriptions and contact names	+10	
13	Sacrament page(s) with descriptions and contact names	+10	
14a	Link to the Church's Facebook and/or Twitter Feed, pages are active and updated regularly	+10	
14b	Link to the Church's Facebook and/or Twitter Feed but they're not active or updated regularly (no updates within the last 14 days)	-10	
15a	Podcasts or Videos of church activities exist, content is relevant	+10	
15b	Podcasts or Videos of church activities exist, but content is not relevant	-10	
16	Link to Online Giving and/or Donation opportunities	+10	
17	Link to church's school page (if applicable)	+10	
18	Capability to capture email addresses (contact us form, newsletter sign up, etc.)	+10	
19	A "click counter" appears on the Home Page	-10	
20	Your church site has a mobile template that automatically detects smartphones	+10	
21	In Google, typing "Catholic Church" and the city in which your located yields your church in one of the top 3 results	+20	
	Total Possible Points =	**250**	

Your Score

0 – 100 Points: Yikes… it's probably time to get going! Get together and discuss solutions that can make your church website fully functional and beneficial to your overall mission.

101 – 150 Points: You've got the basic framework for a working website, but there's always room for improvement! Decide what's working, what's not, and assign tasks for web team members to carry out. Need some help? Advertise in the bulletin that you're looking for volunteers to help get your website up-to-date.

151 – 250 Points: Nice job! You've got a great website, but don't forget to keep updating your content! Your site should keep your members up-to-date, as well as inform potential members or visitors about your faith community.