

GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONAL WEBSITES

RATIONALE

This document has been prepared to assist congregations in the planning and development of websites to support their mission and ministry endeavours. It provides background information to the services of LCA Communications lca.comms@lca.org.au which employs these guidelines in its website-building program.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

When somebody wants to check out your congregation, it's very likely they'll use a web search engine (e.g. Google) to look for your website.

- What will they think about you if you don't even have a website?
- What will they think about you if your website is hopelessly out of date?
- Or if it's as tired and worn out as a pair of old boots?

In this day and age, it's important to have a website. It's the way searchers will gather information about you; if you look okay, then they might come to visit you in person. A website also indicates that you are in touch with the modern world and are embracing change—and that's a positive message. Nevertheless, it's better to have no website at all than one that's out of date, faded and unloved. A website like that tells the visitor loads about you: what if you treat your members and visitors the way you treat your website?

First impressions are critical; so give your website as much care and attention as you would your church building and grounds. Make sure you periodically assess it. Compare it with some of the new websites around the place, and think about how yours could be improved. Ask yourself what message your website is giving to those who come for a sneak peek at your congregation. If you're not sure, ask some people from your work or social groups, preferably people who aren't regular church-goers. Their feedback will be much more helpful than that of insiders.

So, if you think it's time for a website renovation or rebuild, here are some points to consider.

CAPACITY

You've seen many congregation websites go to rack and ruin. Perhaps yours is one of them. It all starts out so well; somebody in the congregation (perhaps it's the pastor) is a web whizz-kid and sets up your sparkling new website; then they leave or lose interest and you are left with something you don't know how to drive. So it sits in the garage, year after year, gathering dust. The difference between an old car and an old website is: unless you take it offline, your website stays in full view, telling the whole world that you're rusty and unreliable. You don't want that.

So, before you launch into this exciting website-building project, assess your congregation's capacity to maintain it.

- Is there somebody who is committed to updating it regularly?—and are you sure they have the requisite skills?
- Is there a backup plan if that person leaves?
- Is there someone who can oversee the quality of the writing?
- Who will provide your high-quality photos, and who make them suitable for web?
- If you have no capacity or limited capacity within your congregation, how much could you afford to pay per month/per year for LCA Communications to provide these services for you? To find out more about our LCA website maintenance services, contact LCA Communications lca.comms@lca.org.au

PREREQUISITES

To set up your own website, you will need:

- a team to determine purpose, message, cost effectiveness, audience, design and content
- budget allocation for the development and building of the website—probably by a third party, unless there is expertise within the congregation. To find out about our LCA website development service, contact LCA Communications lca.comms@lca.org.au
- a website policy (Appendix A)
- hardware: computer, modem
- an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to host your website (This service can be provided by LCA IT Department it@lca.org.au)
- a website address (domain name or URL) (This service can be provided by LCA IT Department it@lca.org.au)
- software for building the site (LCA Communications recommends WordPress and will support only WordPress sites under our web services.)
- software for uploading to the ISP's server
- high-quality graphics or photos in web format
- a person/people with the skills to regularly update, maintain and refresh the website (text and photos)
- understanding of copyright legislation relating to websites
- commitment and funding to keep the website fresh and up to date.

After thinking all this through, you might decide that your website needs are already met through your congregation's presence on the LCA website ([Find a Local Church](#))

[function](#)—which will be updated and improved in 2017). But if you are still keen to build your own website, read on.

MESSAGE

You might have already updated your church signage to include the new LCA/NZ tagline, **where love comes to life**. Your website should carry the same message, for consistency.

Now you need to ask yourself: how is our congregation a place where God's love comes to life?

- In what ways do our members experience God's love coming to life among us?
- In what ways does our community see God's love coming to life in us?
- In what ways would a visitor to our church feel God's love coming to life?
- In what ways would a visitor to our website feel God's love coming to life?

That's an important conversation your congregation needs to have, even if you're not planning a website. But building your website is an excellent opportunity to have the conversation; it will focus your attention on the ways you are sharing God's love with each other and with your visitors and community. And if you're not doing that and aren't planning to do that, well, better you get that sorted out before you consider building a website!

One thing is sure; for all its benefits, a website will never replace God's love coming to life among and through his people. All a website can do is point to that love; it can't make it happen.

FOCUS

Many (most) congregation websites focus on 'us'—what we're doing, and how well we're doing it—which can come across as a sell job. It's better, much better, to focus on your visitors—their concerns, their needs, their questions, their cautiousness. Therefore, when creating your web content, keep your imaginary visitor in your mind and write to him or her. Be real. Don't pretend to be perfect—but, by all means, point to our God who is perfect.

CONTENT

So far you have clarified your message (*where love comes to life*) and your focus (your website visitor). After this, there is no prescriptive list of what should be included on your website. In writing your content, you'll be guided by your location, your mission and ministry objectives, and on the people likely to be visiting your website.

Having said that, there are some things that most congregations should include:

- LCA logo and tagline (you can [download here](#), or contact LCA Communications <lca.comms@lca.org.au>)
- Congregation's name

- Google map and your address (with directions from north, south, east, west, and for car, bus, train, as appropriate)
- Contact details, including an email address and the phone number of at least one person who is pretty much available all the time (probably the pastor). You should also include a phone number of a congregation member who will pick up your visitors if they can't get to your church under their own steam. It's important that people feel they can and should get in touch for any need they might have. Be inviting, be welcoming, be caring.
- [Perhaps your mission statement, but only if it's short and the rest of your website refers to it often and clearly demonstrates how you are living it out. If you are using the LCA tagline, **where love comes to life** (and we hope you are) as your website message, then you might confuse your audience with another 'motto'; better to keep it simple. Remember that your mission statement is helpful to your visitors only if they can clearly see how it will meet their needs; if you can't demonstrate that through your website, then save your mission statement to inspire/motivate your existing membership.]
- Ways you can serve your visitor (the person checking out your website), e.g. a coffee, a chat, help to find accommodation, English-language lessons, an invitation to your monthly BBQ, baby-sitting, lawn-mowing, a baptism, a wedding, a funeral, a lift to church, prayer ...
- Worship service times and locations (absolutely critical that this information is always up to date, particularly for church festivals like Christmas and Easter)
- Regular activities, e.g. Bible discussion groups, activities for children, youth, community etc. (Important: don't use the word 'fellowship' or any other churchy language in naming your activities; describe them in ways visitors will understand and feel that they are invited to attend)
- Links on your website should include: to [LCA website](#), to any school, childcare or aged-care facility you're associated with, to your District website or any LCA agencies that your visitors or members might access frequently
- Photos (mainly of your people; perhaps one picture of your church building so that people coming to visit you will recognise it) You will need the permission of parents or guardians if you use photos of children.
- Something about Lutherans and what Lutherans believe (you can either link to the [About Us](#) section of the LCA website, or copy it into your own website)
- Perhaps something about the congregation's history, especially if you have some interesting local stories to tell
- Information for your members, events/meetings and rosters, accessed via a member login. It's no accident this item is last on the list. If you're building a website mainly for your members, you shouldn't be building a website. Email is a more effective and cost-efficient way to provide routine information for your web-savvy members.

TECHNICAL THINGS

You have the following options for the location and the address (URL) of your website:

1. Website Hosting

The LCA IT Department will host your website, provided it meets certain criteria (Appendix B). Contact the IT Department it@lca.org.au

2. Internet Domain Names

The LCA IT Department maintains a registry of Internet

- Domain Names (eg lca.org.au), and
- Domain Name System (DNS) records - which translate domain names to the numerical IP addresses of the resource (eg website)

for congregations, parishes and agencies of the LCA.

The LCA is a registered domain name reseller offering competitive pricing for setting up and maintaining domain names and their associated DNS Zone records.

The domain name registry and domain name reselling has been set up to prevent

- registration information being lost when people who have registered domain names move on, lose interest, or lose logon and password details
- unscrupulous Internet Service Providers setting up and managing domain names

Congregations, parishes and agencies of the LCA are urged to use the registry. If required, people with the required skills in these organisations will still be able to manage all aspects of their domain name.

Setting up a new domain name

The LCA owns the domain name lca.org.au. The LCA IT Coordinator is able to set up, at minimal initial and ongoing cost, subdomains of this domain name (e.g. www.stjohnsunley.lca.org.au for St John's Unley, and www.slc.lca.org.au for Salisbury Lutheran Church).

Where a different domain name (e.g. ...org.au,com etc.) is required, the LCA IT staff can arrange to register and manage the domain name. The cost of the service is passed onto the requestor. Contact the IT Department it@lca.org.au

Maintenance of a domain name which has already been registered

Where a congregation, parish or agency has already registered an Internet Domain Name, the Domain Name and DNS can be transferred to the LCA Registry of Internet Central Domain Names.

Contact the IT Department it@lca.org.au

WRITING FOR THE WEB

This is a whole topic in itself. From time to time LCA Communications runs [Web Workshops](#) around the LCA/NZ, which include a 'Writing for Web' component. These will be advertised through the primary LCA e-communication channel, LCA eNews. (You should [sign up now](#) if you haven't already done so.)

In the meantime, here are a few tips:

1. Write as you would speak

Imagine you are telling your story to a couple of friends. Don't use words you wouldn't use when talking to them face to face. Use the word 'you' frequently, just as you would when chatting with your friends.

2. Write only one idea per paragraph

Web pages should be concise and to the point. People don't read web pages, they scan them, so having short, meaty paragraphs is better than long rambling ones.

3. Use lists instead of paragraphs

Lists are easier to scan than paragraphs, especially if you keep them short.

4. Write short sentences

Sentences should be as concise as you can make them. Use only the words you need to get the essential information across.

5. Keep stories short

Only 10 per cent of readers scroll past the first screen! So, two screen lengths is the maximum you should write per story; one screen length is ideal.

6. Include sub-headings

Sub-headings make the text more scannable. Your readers will move to the section of the story that is most useful for them, and internal cues make it easier for them to do this.

7. Make your links part of the story

Links are another way web readers scan pages. They stand out from normal text, and provide more cues as to what the story is about.

8. Proof-read

Typos and errors will create a poor impression. Have someone competent in Australian English (as opposed to American English: 'baptize', 'color', 'center' ...) read your work before you post it to the web.

In 2017 LCA Communications will be producing the [LCA Writing Style Guide](#), which will be available online for all LCA agencies and congregations. This will reflect the up-to-the-minute professional editing practices for Australia. You'll be alerted to its availability via LCA eNews.

FAQ

Must our website include the LCA logo and tagline?

If you want your website hosted on the LCA server and/or if you want to use the LCA domain name, then you will be required to have the LCA logo and tagline on your website (refer Appendix B).

Does our website need to be sighted and authorised by the LCA?

If your website has the LCA logo on it, yes, it will need to be checked by the LCA Communications lca.comms@lca.org.au before you make it live. This is standard practice wherever the LCA logo is used.

Can the LCA help us to develop and build our website, and also to maintain it?

Not yet, but soon. In 2016, LCA Communications is launching the Website Integration Project, which will assist congregations to build and maintain websites at very reasonable rates. If you might require this support, contact LCA Communications lca.comms@lca.org.au for more information.

Does the LCA host websites for congregations?

Yes. Contact LCA IT it@lca.org.au

What do we need to know about copyright?

Quite a lot! Copyright legislation is extremely complicated and complex, but essentially it boils down to: don't use anything you haven't written, photographed, drawn or composed yourself, unless you have written permission from the creator. This means you cannot use images, video clips, music or artwork you find on the web unless there is express permission given (in which case, you need to keep a copy of that permission).

On the other side of the copyright coin, if you have original material on your website that you don't want to share, you should indicate the copyright conditions, eg '© Black Stump Lutheran Church, 2017. Kindly request permission to use or reproduce content on this website.'

In 2017 LCA Communications will be releasing copyright guidelines for general congregation use. You will be alerted via our primary communication channel, LCA eNews, when this is available. (You should [sign up now](#) if you haven't already done so.)

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE WEBSITE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE POLICY FOR A CONGREGATION

1. The publishing of a website connected to and/or bearing the name **xxx Lutheran Church** can occur only after consultation with [title/s of authorised person/s], depending on the nature of the website.
2. Material contributed to the website must reflect the values and beliefs of **xxx Lutheran Church** and may be contributed by those approved of by the pastor or other authorised persons of **xxx Lutheran Church**. The pastor or other authorised persons will regularly check the website and communicate with those people responsible for updating and maintaining the website.
3. Material on the website may be edited by a responsible person or persons approved by **... Lutheran Church** pastor and/or authorised persons. This person or persons will regularly communicate with the pastor and/or authorised persons regarding updates to the website.
4. Copyright laws must be adhered to.
5. Permission from parents or guardians must be obtained prior to adding photos or details of children on the website.
6. The following disclaimer is to be used to cover content on linked websites:

*This site contains links to other sites. There may be content on these sites that do not represent the views of **xxx Lutheran Church**. We do not monitor all the content on linked sites. Website users will need to make their own judgement about the suitability of third-party content.*

7. Copyright protection for our own material and images:

© **xxxx Lutheran Church, 2017**. Kindly request permission to use or reproduce content on this website.

More information

[LCA Privacy Policy](#)

[LCA Complaints Handling Policy](#)

APPENDIX B

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CONGREGATION WEBSITES FOR LCA HOSTING AND DOMAIN NAME

1. LCA logo and tagline (do not necessarily have to be together, although this is preferred)
2. Name of congregation, identified as Lutheran
3. Worship dates/times/locations for up to four weeks ahead (preferred), or a statement indicating the rhythm, eg 1st Sunday at 9.30 am at [location]
4. Contact details, including phone number for a pastor or other pastoral carer, and address of the church
5. This statement (can be in footer): 'xxx Lutheran Church is a congregation of the Lutheran Church of Australia' (with link to LCA website), preferably accompanied by LCA logo/tagline

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