Getting Started with
Web Presence

Web presence is not only an essential ministry tool, but is a vibrant proclamation of who we are as God's people.

Developing a web presence is something we know we ought to do, but perhaps we don't know how to start or we feel we lack the resources.

We invite you to begin right here. We want to help you to start with small steps that will give large returns in growing your congregation's web presence.

Answer some questions and make goals for opening the doors to your congregation:

1. How comfortable are you with today's technology?

    a. I have a "dumb" phone and that is complicated enough.

    b. I am open to learning more. I will join new social media sites, but I don't know what to do with them.

    c. I am well connected with my church, my family and the world through technology and social media.

2. What is the most important goal of your congregation?

    a. We want to find new ways to reach people that are not already in the pews.

    b. We want to communicate better with our regular worshippers.

    c. We don't know, but we feel behind the times and like this is something we have to do.

    d. All of the above.

3. How much time do you have to dedicate to building a web presence?

    a. About 5 minutes.

    b. A few hours or more spread across the week.

    c. This takes time?!

4. What's you first reaction when there is a web presence concept you don't know or understand (for example: CMS, hashtag, blog, or friend request)?

    a. I will stop immediately. I am probably in over my head.

    b. I am fearless. I will google the word to learn more or check in with a colleague or friend that is well versed.

    c. I am already proficient. I rarely encounter terms I don't know or understand.

Tally your score: 1. a=3, b=2, c=1; 2. a=1, b=1, c=2, d=3; 3. a=2, b=1, c=3; 4. a=3, b=2, c=1

If your total is 10-12…
Though you might feel overwhelmed, everyone started where you are now. Follow this guide taking one step at a time. We also recommend identifying someone who can help when you have questions and choosing just one piece of your congregation's web presence to begin creating or developing.

If your total is 7-9…
You know this is something your congregation needs. Use this guide to take your own knowledge further. Create 3 goals: one to meet in a week, one to meet in a month and one long term goal.

If your total is 4-6…
You have the gifts, skills and openness to help your congregation communicate more effectively. Use this guide to expand your knowledge: look for ideas to engage more people and improve what you are already doing.

Before you turn the page…

Regardless of the tools you use, your congregation's mission and message will remain the same. We are looking to share the Gospel and grow deeper relationships in Christ.

Does your congregation have a mission statement? Do you know it? If not, this is an opportunity to find out and possibly create one.

This mission statement is the foundation your web presence is built on. Write it here:

The mission statement of our synod is, "Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are **claimed, gathered, and sent** for the sake of the world."

If you look at the mission statements of the largest social media companies, you'll notice that their main goal is to allow people to share what they care about the most with others. It seems like a natural step for congregations to share the Gospel then with the wider community. Social media allows congregations to create a community that bursts out of our building walls. Imagine being able to spread a message carried through the morning subway commute, to a meeting, into the schoolyard, and shared over the dinner table. Don't miss out!

Facebook

Facebook has over 874 million active users in the world. Congregations can add basic information to their profile and then add frequent posts of text, photos, and even video that will appear in your follower's newsfeed. People can also "check-in" to tell others when they are at church.

Here's a few easy ways to take your Facebook page further:

1. **Create an event page** for an event like Vacation Bible School or Summer Camp. Invite people to join to post photos or stories from the event.

2. **Post a daily prayer, Bible verse, quote or reflection.** Help followers to stay centered in faith throughout the day.

3. **Ask people to invite their friends to "like" your page** (this means they become a follower). If you are looking to get a few more followers, try **offering a prize** for the 100th person to like the page. (Prizes could be a study Bible, a customized painting from the Sunday School kids, or the pastor delivering a basket of cookies.)

4. Your page on Facebook will have a profile picture and a cover photo. Use these to **highlight activities in your congregation**: service projects, art exhibits, or recent worship. Another idea is to change the cover photo with the church seasons to help people to learn more about each liturgical season or special day.

Learn More with Video Tutorials
Visit www.mnys.org/webpresence to see a step-by-step video tutorial on starting out with social media.

Twitter

Over 500 million tweets (posts on Twitter) are sent each day. Twitter has many of the same of functions as Facebook, but all posts are limited to a short 140 characters. (The first 140 characters in this section are underlined.) Since space is limited, it can look like another language: Twitter users have a shorthand to keep the character count down.

Here are some common abbreviations on Twitter:

• **RT = Re-Tweet**: This is taking someone else's post and sending it to your followers.

• **TBT = Throw Back Thursday**: Share something from the history of your congregation (often it is a picture)

• **FF = Follow Friday**: Take a moment to recommend who your followers should start following, like @ELCA, @LuthWorldRelief, @ELCABishopEaton, or @ELCAYouth

They also use hashtags (#followedbyawordorphrasewithoutspaces) to help categorize what they are posting. You can see what popular topics are or what other Twitter users are posting under a particular hashtag. Hashtags can be found in ads and other social media networks.

We know the old story where Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenburg. The church door served as the community bulletin board. Five hundred years ago, this was a huge communication tool and it worked well! Today, our front doors are on the web. Both people new to your congregation and those who are already members are likely to look for information through your website or social media pages. Have you made sure people finding what they are looking for?

Your website will give people a glimpse into the community of people that are gathered there. You have the opportunity to show them what your congregation is most passionate about. Your website can literally open the door to them and welcome them into your congregations.

Basic Information

When thinking about your congregation's website, often the simpler, the better. Make a list of the 5 most important things for someone to know. Perhaps:

1. your congregation's name

2. worship times

3. address/phone number

4. staff and pastor

5. how to find more info (where you can link to social media)

These are the things that people should be able to see first when they visit your website. In fact, some congregations might not need more than these things.

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First Impression

How do you know you are welcome at someone's home? Do they put out the welcome mat, hang a wreath, and turn on the light? Studies show that people make quick decisions about a website (in 50 milliseconds!). When you choose a template for your website or talk to a web designer, keep in mind that aesthetics make a huge difference. People tend to stay on websites with clean, simple designs that are pleasing to their eye.

The phrase is "Photos speak a thousand words." Gather recent, high quality photos of your congregation living out its mission. You can challenge others to help gather these with a photo scavenger hunt or find someone who is skilled at photography (or taking a class in photography) that can be at upcoming worship services and events.

Recommended Providers

There are a many companies that make it possible for *anyone* to build website. These "template" providers make it simple. You can drag and drop photos and update information easily. While there are plenty of places that will help you build a website, here are tried-and-true recommendations from congregations:

1. Clover Sites: www.cloversites.com

2. SquareSpace: www.squarespace.com

3. Wix: www.wix.com

4. Dot5Hosting: www.dot5hosting.com

Each of these are $20 or less per month and include customer support, templates, and storage. They also provide simplified backend software, which means creating and editing your website is as easy as typing up a document.

While it might sound like you are describing the feeling of eating too much or a creature that lives in the muddy water of a lake shore, a blog is simply the combination of the words "web" and "log." A blog is an online journal centered on a particular topic or theme. Blogs can demand more overall time and energy because content has to always be added (just like keeping a paper diary or journal). The good news is that churches are already generating a lot of content.

Top Blog Ideas for Congregations

- **Publish sermons** (or excerpts of sermons) from each week. It can be the text, a video, or audio recording of that week's preaching. This also makes it easy for people visiting homebound members to share part of the worship with them.

- **Post a regular devotional** for people to engage in. It may be as simple as the readings for the week are and brief reflections or questions.

- **Create an "at-home" guide** for Sunday School or Confirmation families. Provide a review of the lesson, questions, activities or prayers for them to do together.

- Have all the participants that are going on a mission trip, summer camp, or the National Youth Gathering keep a log of their preparation and overall trip. **Each individual can be an author** and show their unique perspective.

- If you regularly change the message on your church sign, **take a photo and post it**.

- Look through your newsletter and see how many people write articles. What if each staff member or committee chair were **publishing their article** on a blog? (That could save a lot of paper and postage!)

- Is your congregation fundraising or doing a capital campaign? **Use a blog to keep everyone updated with the progress**, share event details, or stories. (A great example is the ELCA Malaria Campaign Blog.)

Create Your Blog

Before you try and create a blog, take a moment to decide what you will be posting. That way, you can choose the provider that offers exactly what you need. Some website providers will be able to host your blog—check in to see if this is a possibility. It will allow everything to be in one place.

Provider best for...	text	photos	video	audio	difficulty
www.blogger.com	X	X	X	X	3
www.wordpress.com	X	X	X	X	4
www.tumblr.com	X	X			2
www.instagram.com		X			2
iTunes Podcasts				X	5
www.youtube.com			X		2

(1=easy - 5=advanced)

Learn More with Video Tutorials

Congratulations! By now, you are equipped with ideas and steps to take to improve your web presence. Your congregation's front door is getting better and better already! To help you with the practical step-by-step instructions, visit www.mnys.org/webpresence to watch our videos, look for training events, and more resources.

Apply for a Grant

On www.mnys.org/grants, you can also download and complete a Website Assistance Grant Application. If your church's new front door needs a new coat of paint (or more), our synod is committed to helping! We will provide up to $500 for your congregation's website creation or development.

Metropolitan New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.