



**WEBSITE BEST PRACTICES –**  
**PREPARED BY DIOCESE OF ORLANDO OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
**AND OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

**CHOOSING A DOMAIN NAME:**

To find out whether a domain name is available visit, [www.whois.net](http://www.whois.net).

Choose a brief name, avoid using hyphens, add keywords people search when on the web. Example: Most Precious Blood Catholic Church chose “Oviedo Catholic” for its domain name.

**HOW TO SELECT A WEB HOST – Questions to Consider**

Shared versus Dedicated (shared might make your pages load slower)

Disk Space - the amount of space your site can take up on the server. Try to find a company that will allow you to grow and expand as the need arises.

Bandwidth - amount of data you can transfer from your site to other computers. Choose a company that will allow you to grow and expand as the need arises.

The Diocese of Orlando uses [HostGator](http://HostGator) and is happy with the service it has received thus far.

**IMAGES AND BRANDING**

To brand your website as Catholic, use imagery that is consistent with the Catholic Church. These images can be purchased from photo stock libraries. However, it is preferable that you photograph images that are unique to your church. Ideal images include the crucifix, stained glass windows, statues, tabernacle, candles, Book of Gospels, images of saints invoking their intercession, chalice, ciborium. It is very important to use images of people, not just buildings. We are the Body of Christ and it's important to show people in prayer, people at Mass, people in fellowship, people of diversity (all ages, ethnicity and abilities).

It is good to use Scripture quotes in your graphics, or imagery to explain who we are as a Church and what we believe.

Photos should be optimized, resized for the web. High resolution photos will cause your page to be slow to load.

See Diocese of Orlando Social Communications Policy, specifically, the Diocesan Network Acceptable Use regarding use of photos. This policy is found on the Diocese of Orlando [Intranet](#).

We do not advise that you have music or videos on your website that launch automatically. That is considered to be intrusive and can cause disturbances when someone is viewing a website in a quiet environment.

## **CONTENT**

Content on your website should be current and updated at least once a week. People will be seeking information online 24/7 and it is in your interest to keep people up to date. Our churches are dynamic places where people live out their faith in communion with one another, participate in the sacraments to receive God's graces and grow in relationship to Christ, participate in small Christian communities, outreach projects, social justice activities and much more! Each week brings new opportunities to engage our community with liturgical celebrations and seasons! Let your website be a reflection of the vitality and energy of your parish community and let it demonstrate how your parish community is centered around God and how the blessings of this faith filled community extend beyond the walls of the church.

Content Management Systems allow multiple users to create, edit and publish content on the web using a browser based application. This system also allows a web administrator to create different levels of "permission" so that content can be created but cannot be published until the appropriate individual has approved. The [Diocese of Orlando](#) uses Joomla. [Catholic Charities of Central Florida](#) uses WordPress which is another content management system we have experience using.

## **WRITING FOR THE WEB**

Use short sentences and paragraphs.

Be concise. It's easier to retain information contained in short sentences.

Be concrete, specific and use an active voice. Details have far more impact than generalities and the past tense weakens your message.

Make a connection with readers by using the word "you" frequently. How can we serve you?

Use language most people will understand or explain the definition of a term that is not used by most people.

Content should be separated by graphics, charts, images – too much text is hard to read on the computer.

## **HOW WILL PEOPLE FIND YOU IN GOOGLE SEARCHES: WRITE FOR SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION: (S.E.O.)**

Most people use search engines every time they go online. How can you help your church or school to be at the top of the list of search results? Determine what people are searching for online? You can visit [Google Trends](#) and compare search terms to view their popularity. Use highly searched words in your website content. Did you know “God” and “Christian” is searched for more frequently than “Catholic” on Google?

## **DESIGN, NAVIGATION AND LAYOUT**

Poynter Research researched online reading habits of 400 people in 4 US cities.

They used eye tracking device to measure “eye stops.” They wanted to find out what on the screen catches our attention.

Findings: Traditional narrative is the least memorable and least appealing design.

Graphics, charts, photos, bullet points and info boxes capture attention more frequently.

Stay away from long narratives or break up content with images and graphics or turn content into multi part pages or segments.

Action photos attracted more attention than studio shots. (Make sure photo release forms are signed by parents of minors.)

Font colors and sizes are important. Try to use a common type font, such as Arial or Verdana, and avoid fancy fonts that are difficult to read. Font size 14 is a good choice.

When choosing web site colors, less is more. If you use too many colors your website will look unprofessional. It is best to design your web site using pastel and earth tone colors. The main background color should be a light color and the text color should be dark.

Short text with photos very appealing. Example: [Way Truth Life](#) homepage

Successful sites show the web’s potential for evangelization: [Bustedhalo.com](#) (Paulist-sponsored site receives more than 15,000 hits per month)

## **USER FRIENDLY LAYOUT TIPS**

Clean: Avoid clutter by including only crucial page elements and arranging them simply and neatly

Clear: Allow ample space between page elements to make your content legible and inviting to the user.

Consistent: Maintain the same basic layout and navigational elements throughout the site.

## **GENERAL COMPONENTS OF LAYOUT**

**Header:** An area at the top of the page that typically contains the page title and graphic; it may also contain navigation elements

**Navigation:** This refers to the tools that visitors use to move among the pages of the site. Navigation can appear in a horizontal header at the top of the page or vertical sidebars (columns along either side of the main content area). Left side column is best practice.

**Core Content:** This is the page's main text or images, which the user has come to the site to read or see.

**Footer:** The footer is an area at the bottom of the page that typically contains links to legal information as well as navigation to the site's main pages, such as "Contact Us" and "Site Map."

Parish main navigation items should include: About Us, Sacraments, Worship/Mass Times, Faith Formation, Ministries, School (if applicable), Contact Us. Quick links for Mass Schedule, Calendar and Bulletins are important because these are some of the most frequently searched items on parish websites.

## **MULTI-MEDIA**

It is a good idea to incorporate multi-media into your website. Examples of multi-media include podcasts, videos and slide-shows.

**LINKS** (Policy found on Intranet)

See Diocese of Orlando policy on Links found on the [Intranet](#).

## **DATABASES:**

A common practice on websites is to obtain email addresses and user contact information so that electronic newsletters, emails and general updates can be sent. Please refer to Social Communications Policy, specifically the Diocesan Network Acceptable Use Policy regarding the use of a contact database. This policy is found on the Diocese of Orlando [Intranet](#).

## **WEBSITE COMPANIES THAT THE DIOCESE OF ORLANDO RECOMMENDS:**

App or Click, Marisabel Wolfinger, [marisabel.wolfinger@apporclick.com](mailto:marisabel.wolfinger@apporclick.com), 800-379-0782  
Diocesan Publications, 877-923-0777, [webdepartment@diocesan.com](mailto:webdepartment@diocesan.com)  
Compass Web Group, Scott Stafstrom [artstrom@gmail.com](mailto:artstrom@gmail.com) 407-963-6775  
Messner Publications, (863) 875-1101, [dennis@messnerpublications.com](mailto:dennis@messnerpublications.com)

Here are some examples of good website design:

<http://stannsdebary.org/> <http://www.oviedocatholic.org/> <http://cflcc.org/>

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