

A PRACTICAL SELF REVIEW FOR CONGREGATIONS

Church Website Welcome Checklist

A simple review tool for churches trying to make their online front door clearer, warmer, and more accessible

A church website begins welcoming people before they ever enter the building. Most visitors are trying to answer practical and deeply human questions: Where do I go? What will happen? Can I participate? Will I be welcomed here?

Use this checklist to notice what a first-time guest may encounter and choose a few changes that make the next visit clearer and easier.

Created by Pastor Travis Wilson

Honest faith. Lasting hope.

How to use this checklist

Set aside what you already know about your congregation and move through the website the way a guest might. Do not explain what a page means or where a link is hidden. Every hesitation or dead end offers useful information.

- 1. Invite another perspective.** Ask at least one person who is not involved in maintaining the website to participate. A recent visitor can be especially helpful.
- 2. Use more than one device.** Complete the review on a phone and a computer. If possible, include someone who uses a screen reader, keyboard navigation, captions, zoom, or another access tool.
- 3. Try real tasks.** Find Sunday worship, plan a visit, locate the livestream, ask a question, and make a gift. Notice every hesitation or dead end.
- 4. Choose a few next steps.** Do not try to fix everything at once. Correct inaccurate information and access barriers first, then work on clarity and design.

Flag what needs attention

Check the square beside any statement that needs attention. Leave it blank when the item already works well, or write N/A beside an item that does not apply.

Set priorities

Fix first. Wrong worship times or addresses, broken contact forms, unusable navigation, missing captions, inaccessible documents, and anything that prevents someone from participating.

Fix next. Missing visitor information, unclear directions, insider language, and pages that make a simple task harder than it should be.

Improve later. Visual refinements, expanded stories, new photography, and larger projects that need planning or budget.

REVIEW 1

The first thirty seconds

Within thirty seconds, a visitor should know whose website this is, where the church is located, and how to take a next step.

- [] The congregation's full name and location are easy to find on the home page.
- [] A brief sentence explains who the congregation is in language a newcomer can understand.
- [] The next worship opportunity is prominent and includes the day, time, and whether people may join in person or online.
- [] The main navigation uses familiar labels such as New Here, Worship, About, Ministries, Events, and Contact.
- [] A first-time visitor can identify one clear next step without searching through announcements.
- [] The home page is current. Seasonal messages, event dates, staff names, and photos do not look abandoned.
- [] The mobile version is easy to read and does not require pinching, zooming, or sideways scrolling.
- [] Pop-ups, animation, background video, or autoplay audio do not distract from essential information.

Top priority from this section

REVIEW 2

Plan a visit

People often carry questions they feel awkward asking. Answering those questions plainly reduces uncertainty and makes welcome concrete.

- [] The address is written as text and linked to a reliable map.
- [] Worship times are consistent everywhere they appear, including the home page, calendar, and social media links.
- [] Parking, drop-off, and the entrance visitors should use are explained clearly.
- [] Accessible parking, step-free entrances, restrooms, seating, hearing assistance, and other available accommodations are described accurately.
- [] Visitors can learn what worship is like, how long it usually lasts, and whether there is communion.
- [] Information about children, nursery care, faith formation, and family participation is current and easy to find.
- [] The website offers practical guidance about clothing or customs when that may reduce anxiety.
- [] A phone number and email address are easy to find, and someone is responsible for responding.
- [] An access contact is provided for questions or accommodation requests without suggesting that people must disclose more than necessary.

Top priority from this section

Welcome and belonging

People look for signs that a congregation's welcome includes them. Let the website show how your community practices belonging.

- [] Welcome language speaks directly to newcomers and does not assume familiarity with church life.
- [] If the congregation makes particular commitments of welcome, those commitments are stated plainly rather than left for visitors to infer.
- [] Photos show the actual congregation and the variety of people who participate, with permission and respect.
- [] People with disabilities are represented as participants and leaders, not only as recipients of care.
- [] Descriptions of ministries explain who may participate, what happens, when and where people gather, and whom to contact.
- [] Staff and leader pages include roles, names, and a human introduction rather than titles alone.
- [] Language avoids stereotypes and does not treat one age, race, family structure, income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability as the norm.
- [] The website gives visitors enough evidence to trust statements such as all are welcome.

Top priority from this section

Worship and online participation

For some people, online worship is a first connection. For others, it is how they remain connected. Make participation easy without requiring people to know your systems in advance.

- [] A Join Worship or Watch Live link is easy to find before and during the service.
- [] The livestream page states the service time and time zone and explains when the video will appear.
- [] Recorded services and sermons include clear titles, dates, scripture references when appropriate, and useful descriptions.
- [] Videos have accurate captions, and important spoken-only information is also available in text.
- [] Online participants can find the bulletin, readings, or other materials in an accessible format when those materials are needed.
- [] The website explains how online participants may request prayer, make contact, receive communion or pastoral care, or take another next step.
- [] A backup message or contact option is available if the livestream does not begin as expected.
- [] Language treats online participants as part of the gathered community, not as spectators who are merely watching.

Top priority from this section

Accessibility

Accessibility is theological. It belongs at the center of a congregation's welcome. The website should work for people who use screen readers, keyboards, captions, magnification, voice control, and different ways of processing information.

- [] Pages use a logical heading structure so a reader can understand and navigate the content.
- [] Text is large enough to read comfortably and remains usable when enlarged to 200 percent.
- [] Text and essential controls have strong color contrast and do not rely on color alone to communicate meaning.
- [] Every meaningful image has concise alternative text; decorative images are ignored by assistive technology.
- [] Event posters and graphics repeat their important details in ordinary webpage text.
- [] Links describe their destination, such as Read the September newsletter, rather than Click here or a raw web address.
- [] Menus, links, forms, and buttons can be reached and used with a keyboard alone, with a visible focus indicator.
- [] Form fields have clear labels, instructions, and error messages.
- [] Videos include accurate captions; audio-only material includes a transcript or useful written summary.
- [] Downloadable documents contain selectable text, meaningful headings, and a sensible reading order rather than being image-only scans.
- [] Moving or flashing content can be paused or avoided, and audio does not begin automatically.
- [] Contact information offers more than one method, such as phone and email, for people with different communication needs.

Most important access barrier to address

Clear content and trustworthy information

Clear information builds trust. Write for people who are new to the congregation and may also be new to church.

- [] Church vocabulary, abbreviations, and denominational terms are explained or replaced with plain language.
- [] Pages begin with the information visitors need most instead of a long history or mission statement.
- [] Dates include the day, month, and time, and recurring events explain the pattern clearly.
- [] Every event page answers what, who, when, where, cost, accessibility, registration, and contact questions as applicable.
- [] The staff, leadership, beliefs, affiliations, and core ministry commitments are easy to find.
- [] Giving pages explain how gifts are used, provide a secure process, and offer help when needed.
- [] Contact forms state what will happen after submission and do not request information the church does not need.
- [] Policies that visitors may need, such as facility use, weddings, funerals, child safety, or privacy, are current and findable.
- [] Links work, downloads open, and forms send confirmation to the person using them.
- [] The website never publishes private pastoral, medical, financial, or contact information without clear permission.

Top priority from this section

Ongoing care

A welcoming website needs ongoing care. Give each part of the site an owner and create a simple rhythm for keeping it accurate.

- [] One person is responsible for the whole site, and each ministry knows how to submit updates.
- [] Worship times, staff information, contact details, and giving links are reviewed at least monthly.
- [] Seasonal content has a scheduled removal or replacement date.
- [] Past events do not remain featured as though they are upcoming.
- [] Broken links, missing files, and failed forms are tested regularly.
- [] Someone reviews the site on a phone after major updates.
- [] Accessibility is checked whenever new pages, documents, images, forms, or videos are added.
- [] The congregation has a simple way for visitors and members to report an error or access problem.

Top priority from this section

The ten minute guest test

Ask someone who did not build the website to complete these tasks without coaching. Invite them to say what they expect each link or button will do. Notice where they hesitate, guess, or give up.

- [] Find the next worship service and tell whether it is in person, online, or both.
- [] Plan the trip from home to the correct entrance, including parking and accessibility information.
- [] Describe what a first Sunday might feel like and what children may expect.
- [] Find the livestream or most recent service recording.
- [] Discover what the congregation cares about and how it serves its neighbors.
- [] Determine whether the congregation's welcome includes someone with a particular identity or access need.
- [] Contact a real person with a question.
- [] Find one way to participate beyond Sunday worship.

What did the guest notice

What felt easy

Where they hesitated

What they could not find

Website action plan

Choose a small number of changes with the greatest impact. Assign each one to a person and give it a realistic completion date. A short, finished list will serve visitors better than a comprehensive plan that never leaves the meeting.

Priority	Change to make	Owner	Target date
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

A simple maintenance rhythm

Every week. Remove expired urgent notices and confirm the next worship information.

Every month. Test navigation, forms, giving, livestream links, staff details, and the mobile home page.

Every season. Review visitor information, accessibility, ministry descriptions, photography, and the site's overall welcome.

Welcome becomes real when people can find what they need and participate fully. Every clear answer and removed barrier helps someone take a next step toward connection.

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