

Start or revitalize a ministry in your church

## QUICK START GUIDE



# WEB MINISTRIES



Quick Start Guide for Web Ministries

Available from:

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# Introduction

You have been given the task of coordinating a website for your church. Though this job may sound intimidating if you haven't managed a website before, many technologies and online tutorials make this task easy to accomplish without specialized technical knowledge. This manual examines and explains the key elements in an effective church website and explores various ways to create and utilize those elements for your own church's site.

An effective church website is not only for use by members; it also exists to introduce newcomers to your congregation, providing them with general information as well as an invitation. It's like a brochure for your congregation. Because a visitor's first impression can depend on your website, it should explain what makes your church special and why people should attend.

## Job Description

As the webmaster, you may already be part of a communication team at your church. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* calls for the formation of a communication committee when church officers are elected. Depending on the size of your church, this committee can include your pastor or an elder, a webmaster, a communication director, a photographer, or any other positions your church may find necessary.

In some churches, one person may function as both webmaster and communication director. If you belong to a smaller church, there may not be enough members to create a communication committee. It may be that you and the pastor are the only people involved in planning for the website.

There are benefits to working with a smaller group when making decisions about the website. While having a larger group for brainstorming can supply a bigger pool of ideas, there will inevitably be a clash of opinions and it can take longer to reach a consensus. It is more efficient to create a smaller committee, with just enough people to get the job done.

Regardless of the size of your team, your job is to coordinate the setup and maintenance of your church's website. You must keep information on the website current, accurate and optimally organized. If you attend a smaller church, you may be responsible for creating all website content. If you attend a larger church, you may be able to rely on contributions from other members. For example, the church event photographers could supply photos; the pastor might regularly submit a worship thought; the A/V team could provide you with audio or video files of each week's sermon; etc. You will simply act as the go-to person for posting these items on the website. You could also give your church's pastor and select ministry leaders the capability to log into the website to post content in their respective sections. Other church members can also help with submitting content or photos.



## BIG DATA + SOCIAL MEDIA SERVICES

Big Data + Social Media Services is a department of the North American Division designed to help ministries, conferences, unions, and the divisions better understand, connect with, and provide relevant initiatives and services to church members through social media outreach and big data analytics—and give voices to member needs and thoughts. The NAD offers social media training on a variety of platforms and resources geared toward churches and members utilizing digital communication effectively. The NAD also educates church employees and members about big data usage and benefits. Through membership services and market research the NAD offers tools to implement digital strategies that engage members, conduct research to meet needs in our communities, and build meaningful relationships with church members. Technology is the avenue by which we hope to reach the highest level of membership engagement possible. Visit [SDADData.org](http://SDADData.org) to check out research, social media courses, a blog, and more.

## Planning

Before you create a new website or begin a major revision of your current website, it is essential for your team to meet, submit ideas and determine your primary goals of the website. Start simple, working up to more detailed projects, and spend as much prayerful time as needed in this planning stage. Remember to consider the future of the website, determining what types of features you may want to add down the road. You will thank yourself later, as many church sites end up needing a redesign within six months because they were not thoroughly planned. A common oversight for a communication committee is to forget to consider possible additions or upgrades to work toward as they gain more experience.

## Target Audience

Your website should target church members as well as the community—and remember that a community person may fall into many sub-categories. For example, one person may have a great deal of knowledge about the Adventist church, but has never been to one. Another may have a background in another denomination and little or no knowledge of the Adventist church. Another may have never actually set foot in any church. Because of this diversity, your content should be arranged in such a way that it is easy for members and visitors to find the information they need.

## Your Church's Mission

Many churches convey their overall mission through their website. There are many options for what to include on the website, but you should focus on your local church's strengths. For example, if your church has a vibrant young adult ministry or an exceptional community services program, make sure it is prominently featured on your website.

**Tip:** Browse other church websites for examples and ideas. Look at a wide variety and identify features that you would like incorporate into your church's site.



## ADVENTIST CHURCH AND SCHOOL CONNECT

Adventist Church Connect provides conferences and local churches with software to get a website up and running within minutes, no matter your level of technical expertise. Our new content management system, ACC 3.0, is intuitive, fast, and easy to use. ACC also offers you access to a dedicated team that provides support and creates training materials so you can learn the basics and more in no time.

### What is included?

- Adventist Living Pattern System – Sites reflect the Adventist Church’s visual identity, showing that local churches and schools are part of a worldwide organization.
- Easy Interface – As you add text, images, and media, you will see exactly how each page will look on the front end of your site.
- Drag and Drop Images – Simply drag and drop a photo into the page you’re editing and it will automatically upload. You can also resize images, adjust the aspect ratio, and add captions.
- Social Media Integration – Connect all of your church or school’s communication platforms by linking your social media channels to icons on your site.
- Online Calendar – Use our calendar feature, or sync the website with iCal or a Google calendar.
- Seamlessly Incorporate Media – Upload audio and video files to your site or link to media already on Vimeo or YouTube.
- Responsive Design – Sites automatically adjust to fit screens of all sizes including computers, tablets, and smart phones.
- Security Features – ACC sites are automatically configured with an SSL certificate for your domain.
- Search Engine Optimization – Sites include many features that will boost search engine rankings. In addition, each page allows you to add keywords and descriptions to help improve SEO.

For more information visit [AdventistChurchConnect.com](http://AdventistChurchConnect.com), call 877.518.0819, or email [support@adventistchurchconnect.com](mailto:support@adventistchurchconnect.com).

## Designing Your Site

### Your Home Page

A home page is an introduction, telling people what website they are viewing. A church’s home page should include the church’s complete name, address, and the words “Seventh-day Adventist.” Your church’s name alone isn’t enough. With approximately 6,000 Adventist churches in the North American Division, there is bound to be overlap in church names and cities where they are located. If people can’t easily find the appropriate information, they won’t visit your site again and probably won’t visit your church, either.



Following the church name and address, the home page could also include your church's mission statement, as long as it is short and concise. If your statement is longer, consider a condensed version, with the extended statement on the "About" page.

Keep the home page simple. You don't need to list every announcement or recommended link—that information can be spread throughout the rest of the site. Rather, focus on prioritizing the general information and making the links to the site's other pages clear and accessible. Pick only a few pertinent items to list on the home page, such as service times, social media links, address and phone number, and perhaps a short welcome from the pastor. Some churches might also choose to list a major upcoming event on a section of the home page. Whatever you choose, make sure each item is placed in a way that represents its priority, determining where the viewers' eyes will be drawn to first.

## Navigation

After you settle on the content of your church's home page, determine what information to include on the secondary pages of the website. That content should then be divided into titled categories that will serve as the links on the home page's navigation bar. These categorical links should be self-explanatory and listed in a logical order. Possible navigation links for churches might include:

- About Us
- Calendar
- Ministries
- Media
- Online Giving
- Contact Us

## Writing for the Web

The use of a copy editor is necessary before finalizing the website. Even small typographical errors can cause a site to be perceived as less credible or unprofessional. If proofreading isn't one of your strengths, ask someone else to read through each page, making sure the tone is consistent and the writing free of spelling and grammar errors.

Remember that you need to write for people in the community. Visitors and even some members do not know the meaning of such terms as ingathering, vespers, or ABC. Be sure to include a short explanation of any acronyms and ministry programs, or write in such a way that you can avoid using insider language.

It is also important that "Seventh-day Adventist" be written correctly when referencing the collective church.



Correct:

Seventh-day Adventist (first reference)

Adventist (subsequent references)

Incorrect:

Seventh-Day Adventist

Seventh Day Adventist

Basic rules for writing are just as important online as in print.

- Stay simple and concise.
- Avoid excessive “to be” verbs: is, are, was, were, have, has, and had.
- Cut unnecessary words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Always identify the source of quotes.
- Be culturally sensitive, staying aware of any terms that may have double meanings.
- Spell out abbreviations.
- Don’t use too many exclamation marks.
- Revise and rewrite.

Avoid long sentences and paragraphs, which will be difficult for readers to follow. Add a heading to each page and use plenty of graphics.

## Evangelistic Content

People who have never been to an Adventist church may likely come across your website, so you will want to include information they will find helpful and meaningful. Here are some suggestions for increasing your site’s evangelistic potential, encouraging website visitors to become church visitors:

- Post the Sabbath school lessons for the corresponding week
- Offer links to Bible study guides
- Add a video or podcast of each week’s sermon
- Include links to Adventist media
- Include information about Adventist beliefs
- Keep information about ministries up to date
- Advertise upcoming special events that can involve the community



## Posting Pictures

Interesting and relevant photos are essential for creating a vibrant church website. High-quality photos will also tell visitors an unwritten story about your church. From these photos they will learn who attends, how to dress for events, and what to expect if they visit.

Whether you take the photos yourself or delegate it to other church members, make sure all photographers use a good digital camera. If photos are too small or the resolution too low, your website photography will look cheap or amateur. To double-check, view the photos on your computer before uploading to the website. Check that sizing and resolution are sufficient for how you plan to use the photo.

## Photography Tips

- Look for subjects who are enjoying the activity.
- Make sure the subject is in focus.
- Strive for variety in people, angles, poses/positioning, candid vs. arranged, etc.
- Aim for simplicity. Make sure the subject of your photo is prominent and the background not too distracting.
- Pay attention to the photo subject's placement, avoiding distracting shadows or protruding objects.
- Long distance shots can show the scope of an event, but pictures in which the subject(s) fill most of the frame are more interesting.
- To ensure best results when using the flash, remember to be 10 feet or closer to your subject. Move in close for indoor photos.
- Take lots of pictures. Select only the best photos for publishing on your website.

## Privacy Policies and Practices

Whether you are about to launch your church website or prepare a major update, now is a good time to make the church members aware of the privacy policies that need to accompany your church's Internet presence. Before you start posting photos on your church's website, you will need to officially obtain members' permission. Since these photos have the potential to be seen by absolutely anyone, it is crucial that the persons in the photos (or their legal guardians) approve their use.

A good way to obtain this permission is by distributing a release form during a church service (as well as making it available online or for pickup if they were not at church that week) that members can sign, confirming that they either approve or disapprove the publishing of photos with themselves as the subject.

A release form created by the General Conference Office of General Council can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/AdventistPhotoRelease>. It is true that not every member will faithfully return the form to the church office, but you will just have to assume that they did not give their permission. Only post photos of people who sign and return the form.



Posting personal information or any descriptions that cause a person to become even the slightest bit vulnerable should be avoided. When creating photo captions, refrain from using last names; and in the case of children, you may not even want to include their first names. In most situations, reserve full names and personal descriptions for the pastorate or guest speakers.

Also be cautious about posting specific information about overseas missionaries. Depending on the political climate in the country where they're located, they could be in danger of arrest or persecution if the wrong person found that information. Refrain from posting names (even first names), organizational affiliations, email addresses, locations, or photos without the missionaries' permission.

## Media

Many churches offer streaming media on their websites. Years ago it was very cumbersome to put dynamic images, video, or audio options on your website, and not everyone had high-speed Internet connections. Now there are much more user-friendly methods for posting various forms of media on your website.

Depending on the services offered by your website provider, you may choose to upload media files directly to your site, or else upload videos to **Vimeo.com** or **YouTube.com** and embed the media on your site. Check with your church's audio/visual team for details on streaming and acquiring media files to add to the site.

## Promoting Your Website

### Choosing a Domain Name

The first step to promoting your church's website is to select a domain name. A domain name, such as **www.AdventistChurchConnect.com**, identifies an Internet site. If your church has its own unique domain name, it will be significantly easier for people to find. Choose a domain name that is simple and easy to remember, including your church's name and possibly the city or street where your church is located.

### Registering a Domain Name

Once your church has selected a domain name, you will need to register it with an approved registrar. Popular registrars include Network Solutions (**NetworkSolutions.com**) and Go Daddy (**GoDaddy.com**).

Registration fees may vary, as many companies will offer add-on services or other products to go with domain name registration. Many churches or ministries register only the **.org** name, but the best solution is to purchase a **.com**, **.org**, and **.net** domain name, and then forward the **.com** and **.net** to the **.org**. This ensures that more people find your site, even if they type a different extension. Most registrars offer this service, though most likely with an additional fee. Research available domain name registrars, taking note of pricing and available options before registering.



## Protect Your Church's Domain Name

It is important that you keep your domain login information in a secure place, preferably in the church office, and that you keep current the email address listed with the account. It is recommended that the domain account be registered with a church-specific email address, rather than a member's personal address. That way if a member moves or switches responsibilities, the domain name information will still stay in the right hands, and you will always be able to receive any notices and stay up to date.

## Search Engine Optimization

When your church's website is ready, you'll want people to be able to find it. Search engine optimization allows your domain to appear on Internet searches when people are seeking churches or searching other related topics. You can easily add your URL to Google if you visit [Google.com/addurl/?continue=/addurl](https://www.google.com/addurl/?continue=/addurl). Choose keywords that effectively describe your site. The better your website is designed and arranged, the higher it will appear in search engine rankings.

Links to your church's website from other websites may also increase your ranking. Make sure your church or conference clerk updates [eAdventist.org](https://www.eAdventist.org) with your domain name so it will automatically be linked from the official Adventist website. You should also link the church's social networking profiles to the church website.

## Marketing

The church website needs to be established as a permanent fixture of church communication. Make sure your church's social media accounts are linked to the website and the URL is printed in the bulletin and on church stationery and pastor's business cards. Work with the communication director and pastor to ensure a consistent visual theme on all of the church's marketing materials.

Alert members to the website launch and any major updates so they know what's happening with the church website. Since you already need to make congregational announcements about photo permissions and finding help with photography and audio/video, take the time to tell the members what it means for your church to have a web presence. Encourage ministry leaders to submit information about upcoming events or outreach projects for the website.

## Using Statistics to Evaluate Your Site

Even if you do everything right, it can still be difficult to tell if your efforts are as effective as hoped until you collect some additional information. Keep in mind that no single piece of data can tell the whole story. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of your site's outreach, try a few of these methods:

- Set up Google Analytics for your website. Google Analytics will allow you to see how many visits your site receives, where they come from, what time of day they are accessing your site, and more. Visit [Google.com/analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics) to sign up.



- Place a coupon on the map page that visitors can redeem at your church. Offer a free book or another incentive for them to visit your church.
- Ask people who have visited your website which features they found useful and what suggestions they may have.

## Evaluating Your Website

1. Does the home page load in a timely fashion? Less than 10 seconds is excellent. If it takes too long, visitors won't wait.
2. Is the home page understandable? Are the features easy to find and well presented? Are there any broken links, missing sections, or spelling errors?
3. Are the navigation options prominent and logical? Is little scrolling required? Are the navigation links sufficient for the intended functions of the site?
4. Does the website contain descriptive information about your church? Does it include ministries, events, and a pastor's bio?
5. Is the content up to date? Are future events announced?
6. Is contact information available? Can visitors find the address, phone number, email, and map?
7. Are meeting and worship times clearly posted? Are they easy to find? Are special events listed?
8. Do the colors and design themes complement each other? Do they look professional and give a positive impression of your church?
9. Does the site include an evangelism component? Is it warm and inviting, providing Bible study information? Does it encourage cyber visitors to become Sabbath morning visitors?
10. Is the content easy to read? Do you notice any grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors? Poorly written content is hard to follow and gives the impression that the website is not a priority.
11. Does the site help eliminate confusion about Adventists? Does it present mainstream Adventist theology? Does it avoid using jargon that would confuse visitors?

## Working with a Designer

While many content management systems, including Adventist Church Connect, provide a selection of templates to use, your church may choose to create a customized design. Maybe you want an exceptionally grabbing website that reflects the congregation's collective personality. If this is the case, consider contracting with a web designer.

When choosing a designer, first find out if there are any web designers in your church. You could also check with a local college to see if any design professors or talented students offer freelance services or ask the alumni office if they can recommend any recent graduates. You could also search for local design professionals or ask colleagues for a recommendation. Local business groups may also be able to recommend designers.



During the initial interview you should check the designer's credentials and ask for samples of their work. You could also contact one of their former clients to get an idea of their skills and what to expect when working with them. Be sure to ask about what is included in the price so you can plan accordingly and avoid exceeding your budget. Once you have located a designer who meets your criteria, you will need to sign a contract before they begin working on your site.

Once your designer is hired, you need to make sure that your plans for the website are clearly expressed, or he or she may not be able to create the look you have in mind. Here are some items to cover at your first planning meeting:

- Discuss budget, keeping in mind that designers' costs vary depending on the complexity of what you want to do. Features such as video, audio, animation, and other interactive options will cost more.
- Show the designer samples of existing websites you like.
- Share samples of photos you would like on the site.
- Share your church's mission statement and ministry goals with the designer.
- Set deadlines—and stick to them!

No matter how wonderful your church may be, a poor website can give a different impression to visitors. You want your website to look modern, professional, and attractive. If you are designing the site yourself, here are some more items to consider:

- Select colors that complement one another.
- Make your site readable by choosing contrasting colors for text and the background, such as black and white.
- San serif fonts are more readable on a computer screen than serif fonts.
- Constantly flashing and moving items can be annoying and remind people of banner ads or spam. Use dynamic images sparingly.
- If anything is animated, make sure it loads quickly.
- Make the location of all buttons and links obvious, and routinely test them to make sure they work.

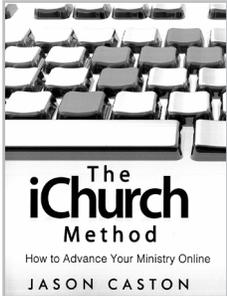
## Conclusion

Thank you for taking on this important responsibility. Your church's website will help members stay connected and visitors learn more about your church. When members of your church work together to fill the website with photographs, audio and video, and information about each of your church's ministries, it will present a robust and accurate picture of your church to the community, while keeping members informed about what is happening.



## Resources

The following resources are available from AdventSource. For a complete list, visit [AdventSource.org](http://AdventSource.org) or call 402.486.8800.



### The iChurch Method

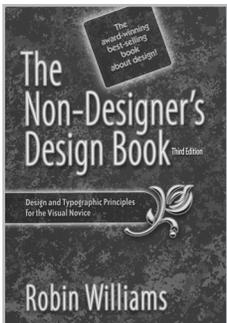
By Jason Caston

The purpose of this book is simple: To help ministries advance the Kingdom online and take the gospel to the world. What is the iChurch method? It's a five-part approach to taking your ministry online and reaching the world:

- Website – A Great Website that is Easy to Use
- Multimedia – Interactive Multimedia
- Ecommerce – Online Stores/Online Donations
- Social Media – Engage and Connect
- Mobile – The Future of Technology and Ministry

Product #250108

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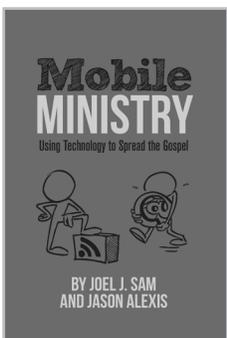
### The Non-Designer's Design Book

By Robin Williams

This book offers quick and accessible design help from trusted design instructor Robin Williams. Using numerous examples, you'll learn what looks best (and why) on your way to designing beautiful and effective projects.

Product #272035

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### Mobile Ministry: Using Technology to Spread the Gospel

By Joel J. Sam and Jason Alexis

This manual was written to help you and your church cross the digital divide. It introduces the spectrum of tools, techniques, and strategies that will transform your church into a mobile hotspot for your members, and for people around the world.

Product #250155

## Web Ministries

This Quick Start Guide for Web Ministries is full of important information to help you start or revitalize your local church's website. You will learn about design basics, what to include in your site, recruiting a web team, writing for the web, promoting the website, and more. Whether you're a new or an experienced webmaster, this Quick Start Guide will inspire you with lots of great ideas you can immediately put to use in your local church.

Other titles in the Quick Start Guide series:

- Communication Director
- Youth Ministries
- Prayer Ministries

For a complete list of Quick Start Guide titles visit [AdventSource.org](http://AdventSource.org)



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