

Parish Website Issues: Diocesan Guidelines

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1. Accessibility issues

Accessibility is now a legal requirement for all UK websites offering any form of service. This includes Church and Parish websites.

Some simple steps should be taken to be seen to be aiding accessibility - in particular:

1. Images & animations: Use the alt attribute to describe **each** visual.
2. Hypertext links: Use text that makes sense when read out of context. For example, **avoid "click here" or "more"**.
3. Page organization: Use a consistent structure. Use CSS for layout and style where possible.
4. Scripts, applets, & plug-in: Provide alternative content. For example, if flash is used for all or for important parts of a website ensure there is **alternative content**.
5. Check your work: **Validate all html and** *ess*.¹
6. Language: Most web users scan rather than read content. Use the **simplest and clearest language** appropriate for a site's content.

If at all possible get your page tested by someone with a visual impairment and/or disability.

2. Copyright

1. Do not use any copied images on your websites unless you have licence/permission to use them. In particular using images found on another website or through a Google image search is stealing and illegal, unless the site gives permission.
2. Similarly do not "hotlink"² to images on other sites as this is stealing the bandwidth of other sites.
3. Do not copy text from another website and use it for your own (other than short quotes). It is an infringement of copyright. Also both your site and the website you are copying from could be penalized in Google ranking.
4. Do not make available or stream music or other audio on your website unless you have the appropriate permissions/licenses.

¹ To validate your html <http://validator.w3.org/>

To validate your *ess* <http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator>

² link to another websites' image source directly

³ Unless the site intends to provide such content, eg a press release

3. Security

If you use guestbooks, forums or any form of user interaction please ensure comments or other form of feedback are approved by the parish webmaster or designated person in the Parish before they are allowed to appear live on the website.

4. Data Protection

Based on the Data Protection Act 1984 there are some principles which should be adhered to:

1. Information can only be held for a specific purpose, which must be divulged, and should not be used without appropriate permission.
2. Access to information should be confined to those authorised to have it for the purpose for which it was supplied.
3. The amount of information collected should be the minimum necessary.

The Data Protection Act seeks to protect people from three dangers:

1. The use of personal information that is inaccurate, incomplete or irrelevant.
2. The possibility of personal information being accessed by unauthorised persons.
3. The use of personal information in a context or for a purpose other than that for which the information was collected.

It is potentially against the Data Protection Act to publish parish rotas on the internet as the people named could be identifiable. A parish list will have been used to compile the rota and putting names from this list necessarily associated with their religion on the internet is putting sensitive information in the public domain. Similar considerations apply to the printing of names of people for Mass Intentions, and lists for prayer naming those people who are sick in a parish.

Moreover there are possible security issues here: identity theft is a hot topic at the moment and in the present climate it is possible that some people will not want their full names connected with other data about themselves printed on the internet.

So if a parish wishes to post rotas on the internet it is important that they obtain written permission with signatures from the people on the rota first.

Alternatively it is possible for the parish to make password protected the pages with the rotas and other lists so their access is restricted and not in the public domain.

5. Child Protection

No photos of identifiable young people under 18 should be used on the website unless written parental permission has been given.

No names of young people under 18 should be used on the website next to photos.⁴

Do not allow young people under the age of 18 to make the Parish website.

⁴ Eg A Caption of "Our Parish is delighted to celebrate the First Holy Communion of one of our younger members" plus photo (assuming parental permission has been given for use of photo) is OK but "Mary Jane Jones, from Year 4 at St Paul's School makes her First Holy Communion" is NOT.

6. Publishing weekly bulletins on the Internet

If Mass Intentions for a named person are given on the website then written permission needs to have been obtained, and similarly written permission needs to be obtained before putting on the internet a list of sick people to be prayed for.

A sensitivity to other information is needed, and content displayed needs to be agreed with the priest in charge of the Parish.

7. Overall Control

The Parish Priest or priest in Charge of the Parish is responsible for the structure and content of the website. Although he will normally delegate the role of webmaster he must have a copy of the access codes⁵ and all of the details connected with the hosting. It is essential that the Priest is fully informed of the content of the website and must approve amendments to the structure and nature of the information displayed. There must be a regular review of the website by someone unconnected with the webmaster. The Parish Priest or his nominee should act as the reviewer.

8. Officially recognised parish websites

The Trustees of the Diocese are liable for the actions of its parishes and therefore Trustees need to ensure that at a minimum the guidelines given here are adhered to. If a parish website is officially recognised as representing the parish, then it will be checked by the Diocese regularly. Notice may be given by the Diocesan Webmaster to remove immediately all information deemed inappropriate. Appeal against such a Notice may be made in writing directly to the Diocesan Trustees c/o Bishop's Secretary, Bishop's House. All official parish websites can be accessed via a link on the diocesan website.

username, password, ftp details