Communications

STANDING OUT IN AN (ONLINE) CROWD

Google has all the tools you need to get your church on the radar: learn how make a simple (and free!) Google function work for your parish.

Pro tip: one of the most effective ways to promote your parish is free. At the annual Word Out Communications Day this January, Sarasota search engine expert Scott Gonello of the firm Gonello SEO discussed with attendees the simplest and most basic item that can help parishes share information; specifically the Google My Business listing. Google is constantly transforming the ways in which it presents information about local businesses and non-profits. In its early days, Google simply indexed the pages that were presented online. A church, at first, probably had a few basic pages of information listing the service times, clergy, vestry and mission statement. But as businesses flocked to the web, websites became more detailed, page numbers increased, page organization became more complex for search engines. Google now indexes a multitude of information, from photos to social media posts to local directories, each of which must be presented instantly to users.

It goes without saying that each parish should have a website that is current, clean, and easy to navigate. Your web address is like the main telephone number or street address for the parish. Google relies upon your information to match it to known facts about your parish, including your street address and GPS coordinates. Google results change by destination; what someone sees in Naples for “St. John Episcopal” might not be the results seen in Tampa for the same search string.

Try this: simply search for your congregation, and see what comes up on Google. Do this on a desktop computer, as you can better see what happens. Search for the parish name in quotes or without, or search with different spellings and colloquialisms. In most instances, the main website of your parish will be your first result, followed by a Wikipedia entry or official Facebook or Instagram page. Ideally, the website will show up at the top while the most important sub-pages of your website shown beneath it. Look to your right, and you’ll see a key element of your search results: the Google My Business area.

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS: JUST THE FACTS

The Google My Business sidebar is a quick shot of practical information which can boost your parish’s visibility and help get people through the door. Make it a group effort: encourage your parishioners to write reviews and add photos while you link social media profiles, answer questions, and update information so the listing stays fresh and accurate.
Once you claim the listing as your own, you can manage the listing as you would a miniature web page. Designate a person at your office to take charge of updating information, answering questions, and monitoring activity.

Get your church community involved: encourage them to post comments, add reviews and upload photos about your church online, all of which feature prominently when others are looking for a church to visit. The listing is public, which means you can’t control everything about it; negative reviews are a fact of (online) life. While you cannot remove negative comments or reviews, enough positive reviews will keep your star rating high. Negative comments can be unwarranted, but at times can bring real issues to light; treat any you receive as a way to find solutions to potential problems. A little positive engagement goes a long way, takes mere minutes, and can yield overwhelmingly good results.

Google My Business appeared in 2014, and it has changed the way many companies approach the web. Gonello says it is simply the most effective, easy and inexpensive way to promote your parish.

Though it’s easy to disagree with their market power, Google receives and filters the lion’s share of search requests, so churches should take advantage of the opportunity to use it to attract new people in the community. While those are important thoughts, the reality is that a full 90 percent or so of searches come through Google.

A Google My Business listing is simply a gratis, bare-bones advertisement about your church. It’s there whether you like it or not, pieced together by algorithm and connected to your address on Google Maps, which is an essential part of a future parishioner finding their way to your parish.

If a church has not posted its own Google My Business, what you’ll see are the results from elements posted online about your church. Sound troubling? Fear not: Google offers each institution an opportunity to curate the information on the listing, and add your own photos, events, and information. The magic words to look for?

**OWN THIS BUSINESS?**

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Need help with your online communication initiatives? Visit our website at episcopalswfl.org > About Us > News Room to download the Web & Secret Shopper Checklist. For more information, email Communications Director Garland Pollard at gpollard@episcopalswfl.org or call 941-556-0315.

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**SAVE THE DATE**

**EASTERTIDE QUIET DAY**

The Rt. Rev. G. Porter Taylor, who served as the sixth bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina, will be the facilitator for the Eastertide Quiet Day at Dayspring on Tuesday, April 30.

G. Porter Taylor served as the sixth bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina from Sept. 18, 2004 to Oct. 1, 2016. A native of Asheville N.C., earning his B.A. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his M.A. in English from the University of South Carolina, and his Ph.D. in theology and literature from Emory University. He received his M.Div. from The School of Theology at Sewanee and served at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Currently he teaches at Wake Forest University Divinity School as a visiting professor for Episcopalian Studies.

Before his call to the episcopate, he served seven years as rector of St. Gregory the Great Episcopal Church in Athens, Georgia. He is the author of To Dream as God Dreams: Sermons of Hope, Conversion, and Community, and From Anger to Zion: An Alphabet of Faith. He is married to Jo Taylor, an artist and research nurse. They have two children, Arthur & Marie.

**THE DETAILS**

**TUESDAY | APRIL 30**
**DAYSPIRNG EPISCOPAL CENTER**
**TIME | 10:00 am**
**COST | $10**
**WHAT TO EXPECT | Teaching sessions, lunch, personal time and walkabouts on our Manatee River campus. Individuals and groups are welcome.**

**REGISTER ONLINE** dayspringfla.com/easter