Build a parish/benefice website presence

A good web presence is a vital part of any communications strategy today.

The first place a person will look to get information about your church is online through either a Google or Facebook search. Therefore, the internet is a great opportunity to reach new visitors to your church.

The internet is also a great place to connect with your existing congregation and encourage engagement, community and sharing of information.

This guide is in order of priority to help you develop the web presence that is right for you:

1) **A Church Near You**
2) **Google Maps**
3) **Social Media**
4) **Building a website**
   Consider target audience and content
   Site structure x 2
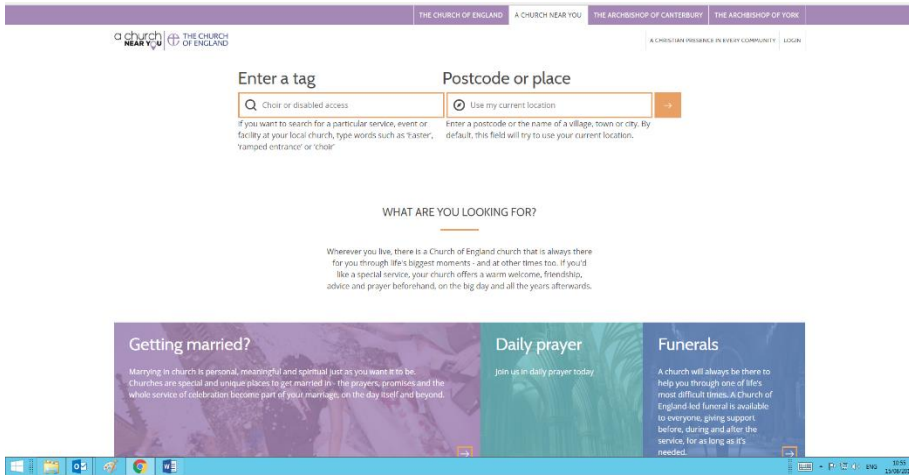   Creating a website with A Church Near You
   Creating a 'do it yourself' website
   Creating a website with an external company

Growing in God

1   Church Near You (ACNY) directory listing

ACNY is the Church of England directory of all churches across the UK, the site gets a huge amount of web traffic and the traffic is growing.


We would recommend that **all** parishes have an up to date listing outlining basic information, services times and contact details regardless of whether you have a website or not.

Your Church directory listing can link to your website. If you have an existing website link your website URL to your ACNY directory listing - which will mean you will not have to update both and you can save money!

You will need to establish who your ACNY editor and administrator are to update your entry and the site has a Q&A to help you do this.

2 Google Card
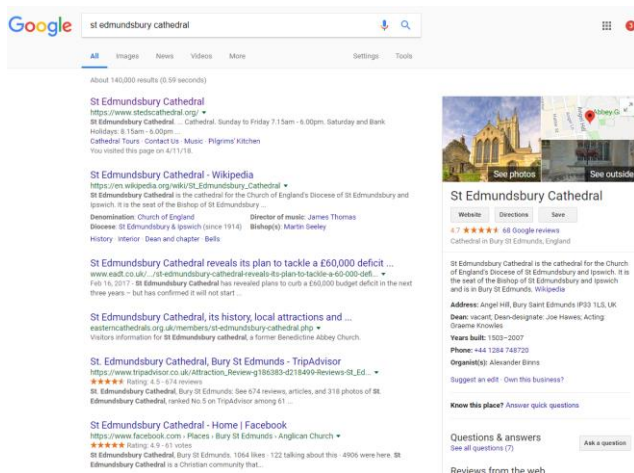
Every church has a **free** directory listing with Google and Google Card. However, you do need to claim your card. We recommend **all** churches do this as soon as possible.

This is the information listed on a Google listing page after a search...see the example of the Cathedral to the left. The card links to Google Maps and helps people find your church alongside contact information and a link straight to your website.

To do this you will need to create a Google My Business listing (or get access to one, if it already exists).

1. Go to google.com/business
2. Sign in to your Google Account, or create one if you don't already use Google services.
3. Enter the name of your church and click Next.
   Enter the street address of your church and click Next.
   You may also be asked to position a marker for the location of your church on a map.
4. Use the search field to select a business category and click Next.
5. Enter a phone number or your website address for your church then click Next.
6. To complete sign-up and verify your connection to this church, click Continue.
7. Select a verification option.

Note: If you see a page that says, 'This listing has already been claimed', click Request ownership and follow the directions to claim your business. Learn more about requesting ownership.

3 Social media

Facebook is the first-place people look to find something online!

Social media is a valuable communications tool as it enables us to create a community environment in which to share information and celebrate success.

You can use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram and depending on your resources you may want all three! We would recommend starting with a Facebook page for your church. If you are a multi-parish benefice it may be more time efficient to have a Benefice Facebook page for all your churches. Clergy may also wish to have an individual Facebook presence too operating as a public figure.

Facebook is great for posting latest news, times, events and more and creates community engagement through sharing and liking posts.

A Facebook page could be sufficient as your only online presence, but this depends on your congregation size and target audience. You could have a basic website containing standard non-changing information while Facebook could have all the up to date information – both could link together and complement each other.

We have prepared a How to? for Social Media - Basics. This covers Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and it is a starting point from opening a social media account right up to running promotional campaign on Facebook.   Please download a copy from our website.

4 Building a Website

4.1 Target Audience and Content

When investing time and money to building a website it is important to consider who will looking for your church and then think about what they might be looking for and what you can offer them.

Consider your objectives for building a website and what you are trying to achieve. The table below is not an exhaustive list but some suggestions to start you off.

Every church is unique so think about how this could work in your environment particularly if you are a multi parish benefice with one website and lots of churches.
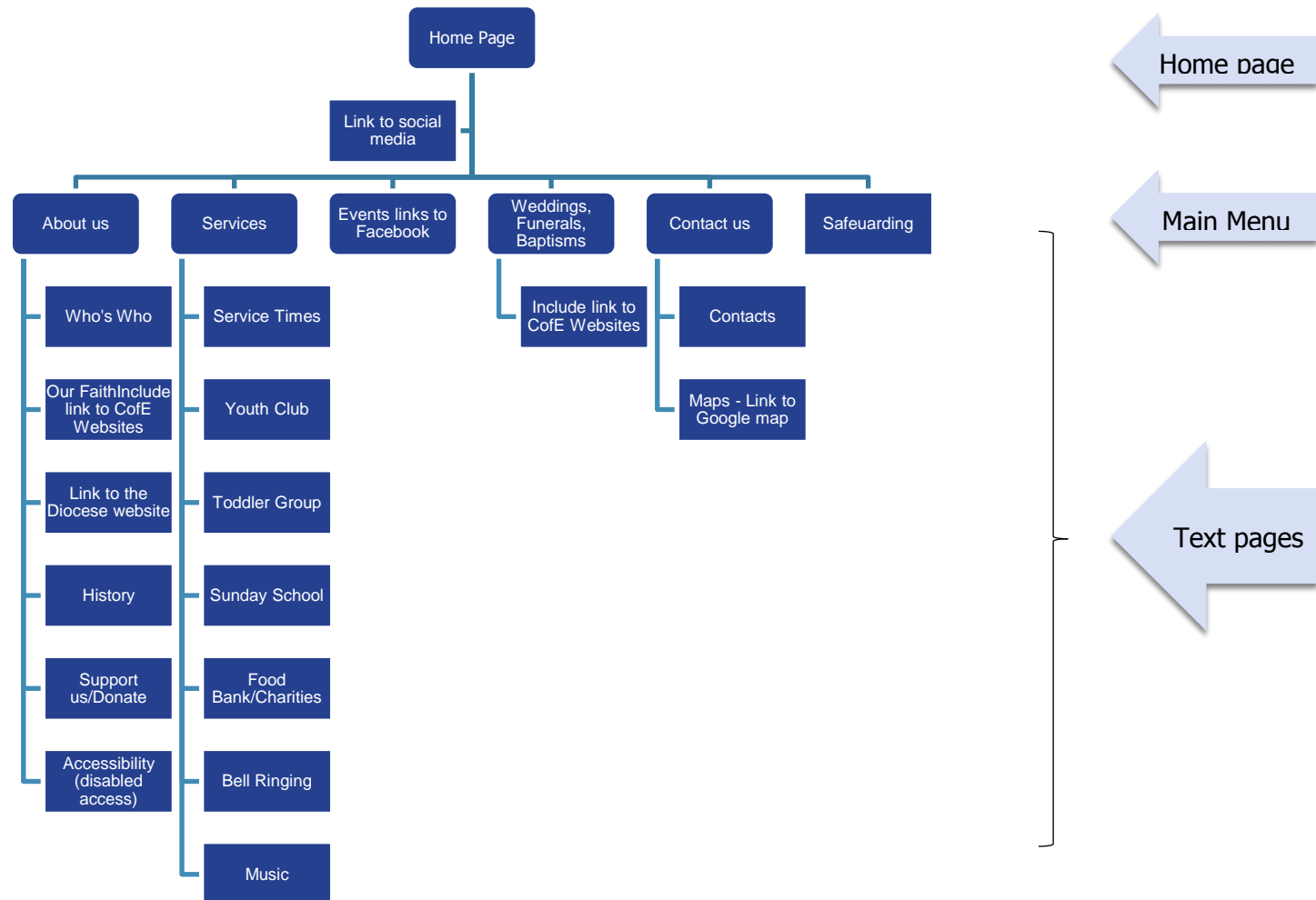
Audience	Content
PCC/volunteer members (internal)	Service times, calendar/dates, rotas, who to contact, prayer diaries, photos (gain consent first), audio clips, film.
Existing congregations (internal)	Service times, dates, latest news, events, music who to contact, photos, audio clips, films, safeguarding
Potential church visitors (external)	Opening hours, what's available for tourists, church history.
Future members (external)	A welcome and an invite from your Vicar, who's who, what we believe, Church vision, opening hours, Information about your type of offering/style of worship, who to contact, accessibility, photos with a focus on people not just the building.
People using current services such as Messy Church or a Youth club (internal)	Times, details of offering, who to contact.
Those arranging a wedding, funeral or christening (external)	Pictures, top tips, fees, who to contact. Links to national sites.
Your local community (external)	Opening hours, information about your type of offering/style of worship, who to contact, what is Christianity? events, links to schools/community groups, food banks support, activities in the community, links to social media.
Other	Contact information, Directions/maps, Privacy notice, copyright, Freedom of Information, Cookies policy.

We recommend you use carefully written, proof read and well edited text (bite sized chunks of text are best) for your website content. Do think about the time you will be able to allocate updating your website content. Perhaps have static information on your website and use social media for current changeable information.

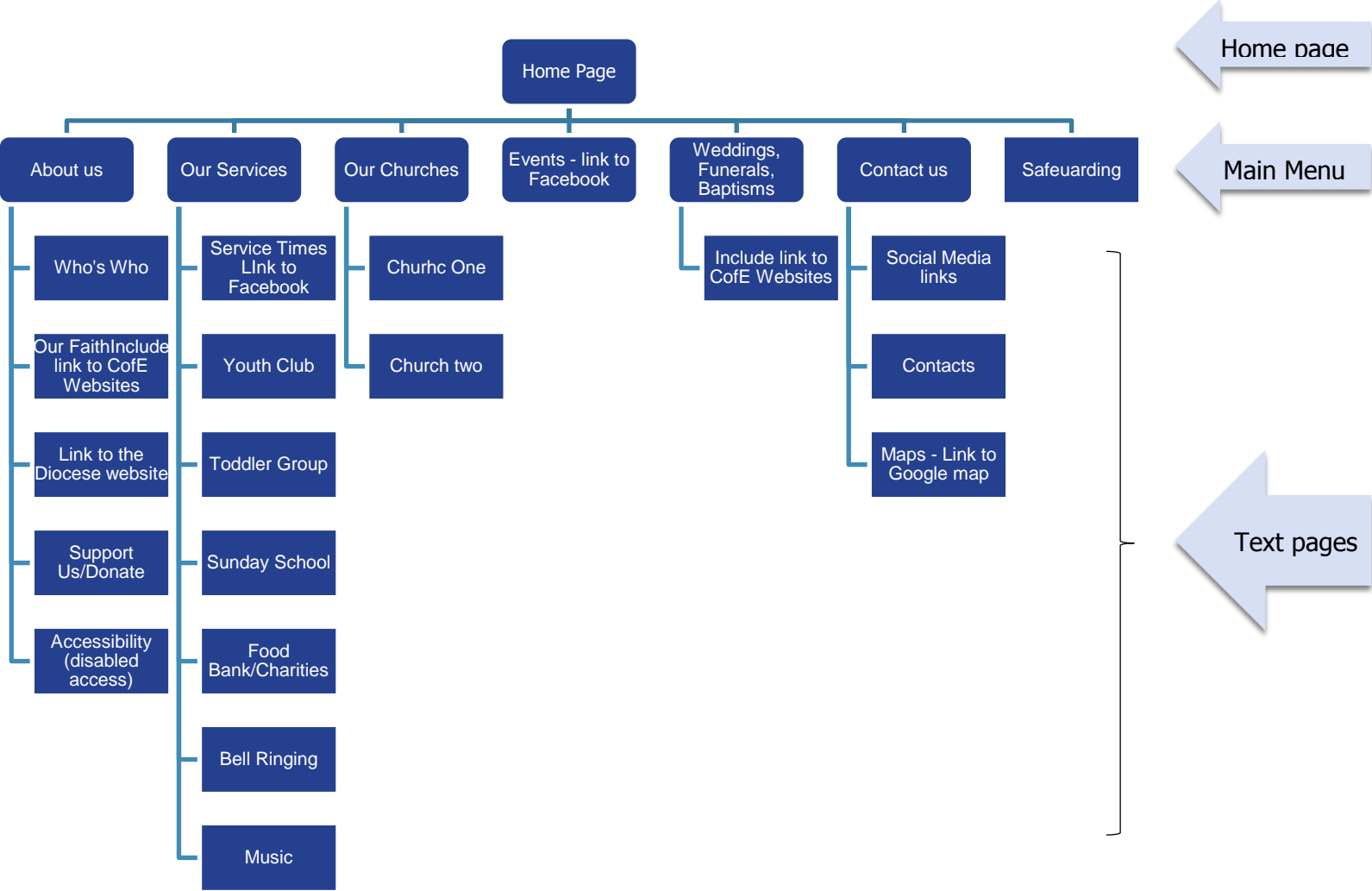Quality photography is essential. Preferably use your own pictures (with consent), but you can source free pics from the online services such as Pexels, Pixabay or Unsplash. NB: if you use copyrighted images without permissions, you may get fined!

You could use your website and social media presence as a method of reducing the printing of materials such as pew sheets and other information, this is good for the environment too!

4.2   Possible Content Structure for a church

Possible Content Structure for a Multi Parish Benefice

Home page

Main Menu

Text pages

Home Page

- **About us**
  - Who's Who
  - Our FaithInclude link to CofE Websites
  - Link to the Diocese website
  - Support Us/Donate
  - Accessibility (disabled access)
- **Our Services**
  - Service Times LInk to Facebook
  - Youth Club
  - Toddler Group
  - Sunday School
  - Food Bank/Charities
  - Bell Ringing
  - Music
- **Our Churches**
  - Churhc One
  - Church two
- **Events - link to Facebook**
- **Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms**
  - Include link to CofE Websites
- **Contact us**
  - Social Media links
  - Contacts
  - Maps - Link to Google map
- **Safeuarding**

4.3   Creating a website with ACNY

ACNY is now offering an extension to their directory entry and offering website pages for FREE. The new functionality includes:

- The ability to point your domain name (the URL of your website if you already have one, for example www.xyzchurch.co.uk) to your ACNY page. This means you can stop paying the fee charged by your website host and/or designer.

- An opportunity to add news stories and notice sheets to your pages, allowing you to promote upcoming events, good news stories from your church and notices.

- An image gallery for 20 of your most up to date photos.

- Customisation choices – from the ability to select the branding of national campaigns for your page to which news stories and events will appear on your church's homepage.

- Analytic information showing web editors how many people have visited your page this week, month and year.

This new functionality will offer churches and benefices an entry level **free** website.

Coming soon: ACNY is also developing a landing page for multi parish benefices. This new development will link all the churches in the Benefice together. Each church will continue to have its own unique page, but Editors the be able to duplicate events, services, news sheets and blogs across the various churches they edit. Please look out for launch details via eNews and the Diocese Facebook page.

4.4 Creating a website with a 'do it yourself' service

For churches on a smaller budget or with some technical ability a 'do it yourself' option may work. You could consider include services from online providers such as Wordpress, Wix.com, Weebly.com or Squarespace.

These online programmes offer template designs and easy to use platforms to build your own website.   Some are free while others charge a monthly fee to support their services.

We do recommend you purchase a domain name for your website. Choose a short, memorable name easy to reproduce on letters, publicity and noticeboards. The company may be able to purchase these for you and they are renewed biannually. It is important to find a name that represents you and will be easy to find by those in your community. For example: www.eyeparishchurch.co.uk rather than www.EPC.co.uk!

You may be able to include short cuts to enable automatic updating for some areas of the site. For example, if you use Google Calendars this can be embedded into a Wordpress site allowing updates to happen automatically.

4.5 Creating a website with an external company

If you are a larger church or multi-parish benefice you may need a bigger project with more technical support. There are different companies in the market offering web design and set-up services. You can use a local supplier and the following are Christian based organisations with a record of building sites for churches. The Diocese is not endorsing these companies however you may wish to contact them as a starting point for a guide to services and costs. We recommend you get three quotes from different companies for comparison.

www.ChurchEdit.co.uk and www.Church123.com have good offering for larger websites while you may prefer a local production company such as www.digital-spirit.co.uk offering both large and smaller websites. Alternatively, if you like the look of a particular website, contact the parish and ask them who they used and how they got started!

How to approach this project:

- Hosting services are the fees a web company charges to place your site on the web and store and hold the images and content of your site. These will be charged annually. Unless you can avoid these by linking to ACNY.

- A web company will charge for the build, programming and construction of your new site. We recommend you write a basic brief for your requirements and then get three quotes from different companies to compare before making a decision. A sample brief is shown below.

- Depending on your approach you may then pay for a maintenance fee monthly that pays for your web company to update the site on an on-going basis or you may buy a content management system (CMS) that allows you to update content yourself and pay for ad hoc updates due to system renewals etc as and when required.   Whatever you decide it is vital you keep your website up to date or use social media for this type of content and link it back to your website.

- A method of analysing the results of your website. Google Analytics offer an analysis of your website looking at traffic for each page and other usage details. This is useful, so your Web editor can see what is working and what is not and improve your website on an on-going basis.

Writing an outline brief:

- Outline your objectives – what you want to achieve by having this website.
- Key features: outline what you want for example: easy to find, visually appealing, easy to navigate, informative and up to date
- Visual identity: you will need a logo for your church (one which you can use online and on printed materials to aid recognition).
- A visually attractive design for a home page (simple and without too much clutter) and a follow-on page template design (usually with more text).
- Outline what you want to include and estimate the number of text pages – you may wish to provide your site plan (a basic example is shown under content) showing navigation and possible content.
- Modules required for the different features you may need – news, events (with or without a booking system or use Eventbrite), case studies, calendar, search facility, service times, donations button, online shop and more.

- Population of the site. The website company may be able to produce your first draft using your supplied text and images, or you may prefer to add in the content yourself.
- A method of updating content – content management system for the whole site or restricted to sections that need updating (i.e. events). Or a monthly agreement for the company to update content regularly.
- A version of the website adapted to be suitable for a smart phone.
- A method of promoting the site – Search Engine Optimisation (helping you to get to the top of the Google search listings) and registering with Google. Make sure you put your website address on all your promotional materials.
- A method of evaluating the site afterwards, annual reviews perhaps or a maintenance contract. Website construction is not a one-off cost, technology updates are frequent, and you can easily get left behind if you do not keep up to date with technology.

Communications Department

Look for more How to? guides on our website:
www.cofesuffolk.org/resources-information/communications-and-press

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