

REACH Digital Ministry Photo Guidelines

Photos and Videos on Your Church Website

They reflect your congregation back to itself and also make it easy for interested parties to understand what the church is about. They are very powerful engagement tools and one of the best forms of social media to use.

Best Practices:

No Flash and No Red Guide Lights: Refrain from using flash and also try not to move around too much, otherwise you may distract ministers and other worship service participants. It's best to sit in the front row of pews. You can take pics from as far back as the third row, using a telephoto lens. If, however, you sit behind the front row, you'll risk disturbing worshippers.

Take Pics Every Week: If for some reason, a service doesn't lend itself well to a photo for the home page of your site, take a photo of after service activity in coffee hour. Potential subjects: Activity around sign-up tables for various groups and events; bake sales; cook-off events; all-church lunches; all church meetings after a service. Events that occur on other days of the week make for good photos too. If you allow your church members to upload photos to your church site or church Facebook page, take one of them to put on your church's home web page. The more photos your church goes take of church life, the more choices you have for engaging images on your church website home page.

Joys & Concerns/Sorrows:

Do not take pics of joys and sorrows spoken by individual members during the service - ever. Those moments are deeply personal and church members will not remember that they may be photographed in those moments if such photos become a practice at your church. Don't do it ever – even if you have no intention of publishing them. Photographers must respect the safe zone that a sanctuary is.

Photos of under-age children:

Have parents of kids in choirs sign release statements at the beginning of each church year. Photos of kids on the chancel signing are okay to publish when release forms are conditions of joining choirs. Do not name underage kids in

captions or in the file names of .jpegs. Exceptions, on a case by case basis, are made if parents consent to their child's name being used.

For example, if you take pics of kids bread for an upcoming service, you can ask parents who are present if it's okay to identify the kids in a caption for a photo to be used on the home page of the church's website. The photographer is responsible for making sure the church's web site admin knows he/she received permission from the parent.

Avoid Making Extra Work For The Website Admin: Volunteers and part-time staff likely administer your church's website. If you do not you're your photo files (.jpegs) with a discernable, short name and date, you'll make it harder for the web admins to publish and maintain the church site. Please put titles on your files. Even if it's just the date of the service. E. g.: Aug. 29, 2010. It's preferable for you to write something that explains what's going on in the pic. For example, "Breadmaking101212.jpg" is easily understood to be a picture from a bread making activity on Oct. 12, 2012. If you don't properly name the files, then staff and admin volunteers may also have to guess what the photo is about. They may not have attended the service or activity. Use a Sunday service, Order of Service, to inform titles of photo assets.

Checklist for Church Photography:

- **Use Flickr:** Or some other free photo-storage site on the web. Flickr is good because many website services, such as Ning and Wordpress, make it easy to import photos you keep on Flickr. If you upload photos to your own website hosting service, you may end up having to pay for more storage capacity. There's no reason to do this. Use a free service that has exports to your site or that offers embed code that you can insert into your web pages. By storing your photos on Flickr, you ensure you'll always have them, even if your church changes website providers in the future. After you upload your pics to Flickr, make a "set" of them with the date of the service as the set's title. When you do this, you make it very easy for your web admins to import the set in one swell foop (!) and save it as an album on your church's site. Otherwise, the admins will have to drag and drop each photo into an album. If you have a church Facebook page or group, you can upload photos to it as well.

- How many photos should you take at a service or event?
Take enough photos so that you have at least 4-5 good ones that can go onto the site. Mary Ann or I will create an album of the service pics to run as a slide show on the sermon text page. This is primarily why we need a few pics from each service.
- What makes the best home page photos?
One of the pics you take will go up on the Home Page. Close-up shots of activity on the chancel (cement platform on which nearly all activity at a Sunday service takes place) work better than shots of lots of people. Photos with more than three people in them are not as engaging. Getting a picture of the entire choir might make sense some times. But pictures of a few, very animated singers is better.
- Ministers aren't the stars: Sometimes a service doesn't have much visually to offer other than a shot of a minister. That's okay. But remember that it's the congregation and members who are involved in the services that make the best pics. We always want a good shot of the minister(s) from a service, but we don't want to always focus on them and have them in the main promotional area of a church website. For example, if a minister's sermon uses a bowl of strawberries as a prop, you could take a pic of him or her with the bowl. But if the strawberries are meant to be eaten after the service by members, get a photo of that and write a caption that connects the strawberry eating to the sermon.
- Small file sizes : Optimize your pics so that they are no larger than 18K each. If you don't keep the weight small, photos can slow down the loading of home pages. If you don't have software or camera features that will do this, here's a free website that will <http://www.imageoptimizer.net/Pages/Home.aspx>
- Dimensions: They depending on the dimension of the spaces you allocate for them on your church home page. For example, 400w X 300h photo might be very effective or it might be way too big. 300 x 150 might be just right, or it might be too small. You'll have to experiment. Either way, make sure that the photo size that photographers deliver images to the web admin are at least 400x300. It's easy to downsize a

photo and keep the resolution, rather than trying to make a photo that is too small work in a larger space.

- Deadline: Photos taken of Sunday services need to be available to web admins as soon as possible after a service so they can be uploaded to the church website – especially if you change the main photo on your home page often to reflect an active congregation. It's great when you can get the photos uploaded by Sunday night.
- Credits: Give credit to photographers - especially when an album is full of his/her work. Many website services enable their users to create albums, or collections, of photographs. These services allocate space in the albums for identifying who took the pictures.
- Videos: Any digital camera or mobile phone can take videos – and fairly good ones. Videos of sermons are engaging and very beneficial to individuals who can't make it to church. If you can't shoot a video of an entire sermon or service, capture snippets and publish them to your site by way of YouTube. As with Flickr, YouTube offers free video storage and embed code that makes it easy to display videos on your website. Do not video tape Joys & Sorrows/Concerns. Some churches publish recordings of their services on local access cable TV stations' websites. Those channels require their viewers to download plug-in software in order to see the videos. If you publish videos to YouTube, you avoid this extra step which is often a burden to your members. The plug-ins often don't work on older versions of browsers, which many church members have. Don't assume everyone updates to the latest version of software. Videos posted to YouTube or your website can be viewed by most home computers.