

# FACEBOOK for Congregations

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Thanks for your interest in resources to help your congregation's Web ministry. Facebook can be a great outreach tool and a way to help your members connect with each other. We're still working on social media pointers and tips for the [www.elca.org/webministry](http://www.elca.org/webministry) site, so for now I'll just share some of the resources that I've been collecting thus far:

1. Be intentional about your use of Facebook. Congregations often set up a Facebook page without a staff person or volunteer committed to developing it as a resource for congregational communication. Outline your intentions for the presence:

a. Is it mainly for outreach – to reach people who would never end up on your congregation Web site? If this is true, how can staff and members be encouraged to post regular updates, questions and information on your Facebook wall that will provide a window into congregational life.

b. Is it mainly for members? If this is true, is it primarily for member socializing, or committee work? Are active members and leaders using other collaboration tools now? Would the Facebook presence undermine the effectiveness of those groups? If it is mainly for socializing and connecting between all members, how can you stimulate that sharing and connecting? Is there a “member care” or “fellowship” group who could intentionally post reflections, event images and videos, questions for members to respond to?

c. Is it an electronic bulletin board? In the least, your Facebook presence might be a convenient way to get announcements out to members in a place where they are already visiting (and each announcement can be used to drive people to more information on your congregation Web site). The idea is that, in addition to collecting together updates for occasional publication in the Sunday bulletin or congregation newsletter, as soon as you hear about some event, deadline, news item, update, etc., you would do a wall post on the Facebook page. The best posts are ones that also invite members to comment.

2. Be careful about staff and volunteer use of Facebook. The main concerns here are for privacy issues and appropriate behavior. Use a password-protected service as a way to share directory information, photos with captions, etc. only among members. Facebook could be your more open community presence, but monitor it to make sure that member privacy is respected. This involves common sense concerns:

a. Don't post images of children without the consent of their parents

b. Don't caption photos with full names of children

c. Don't post member e-mail addresses or phone numbers

d. Help protect members from fraud.

e. Make sure that church staff and volunteer leaders are using church computers appropriately.

3. Help members understand Facebook. Here is an outline for a [congregation workshop](#) about Facebook. It's a

little dated, since Facebook changes pretty frequently, but may still have useful information for orienting members.

4. Look for models of effective use of social media in congregations. One of my favorite examples of a congregation with well-developed e-communication tools is Zion Lutheran Church in Buffalo, Minn (<http://www.zionbuffalo.org/>). A church staff person does regular Facebook posts and members occasionally comment (<http://www.facebook.com/ZionBuffalo>). It's interesting to note that, in general, discussion boards seem fairly quiet on Facebook, but people are often willing to comment and "like" wall posts. Polling congregation staff and lay leaders to see if others are willing to post and comment is an important step, otherwise, by default all posts will be from you. Which may be helpful for members, but not as interesting as the variety you have with many people contributing. The "Welcome" page is useful for people who may be new to Facebook. Facebook has become the most popular photo-sharing site. Zion has built up a large library of albums that help provide a window into congregational life. Facebook's "tagging" feature lets parents or the people pictured decide if they will be identified in a photo.

The topic of congregation use of social media was explored a bit in the Feb. 2010 issue of The Lutheran Magazine. Here are several articles from there:

[http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=8264&key=68293694](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=8264&key=68293694)

[http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=8818&key=77757122](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=8818&key=77757122)

[http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=8817&key=77739487](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=8817&key=77739487)

5. Browse resources for church communication. Here are a couple sources:

Articles from "Church Marketing Sucks": <http://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/tag/facebook/>

The best congregation Facebook presence is one that "runs itself," with congregation members and staff contributing regularly in ways that enhance community and help make connections between members. This helps to make visible the real community that gathers on Sunday morning and during the week, and makes others want to get involved more or to consider joining.

I hope this information is helpful and that you'll share your learnings in this area so we can develop better resources to enhance congregational communication. Best wishes and good luck as you strive to spread the Gospel online.