

IV. Some of our own examples

Our Communion: www.anglicancommunion.org
A magnificent unofficial site, with links to every diocese and parish: www.anglicansonline.org
Our diocese: www.diocesenyny.org
Our inter-parish council: *none!*

St Mary's parish: www.stmarysi.com

V. Some more remote examples

And some other approaches:
handsome and classical: www.ascensionandsaintagnes.org
minimal and pictorial: www.stmarks.it
minimal and spare: www.stmarythevirgin.org.uk
friendly and clean: www.stpaulindy.org
more contemporary: www.stdave.org
irritatingly modern, and this dated:
www.stpaulsdorking.org.uk
cluttered (although this won a prize!)
www.paldingchurches.org

VI. Getting started

Web committee; hiring a designer; maintenance; the diocese and the world

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BEING CHURCH

A CELEBRATION OF THE MINISTRY
OF THE CHURCH IN STATEN ISLAND:

Cyber-parishes: Your Church in Virtual Reality

A practical workshop on how anyone, even a rank novice, can set up a parish website and then use it to attract people, communicate with the faithful, and fold the semi-faithful back into parish life. Topics will include initial and ongoing expenses, finding a webmaster, and linking to the diocesan and national sites.

We're going to discuss:

- ☞ the *why* of parish websites,
- ☞ the process of planning one,
- ☞ the commercial business of hiring a website designer,
- ☞ and the mildly technical question of maintaining a site.
- ☞ Also a quick run through cybervocabulary, which is very ugly and alarming, as it is meant to be, being invented by Young People

I. Absoluter beginner questions: What *is* a computer, exactly? What is the Internet? What is cyberspace? Who is in it? Why does it matter?

History: ARPAnet, a U.S. Department of Defense programme, in about 1970; Swiss scientists develop the World Wide Web in 1989; government pulls out 1992; by 1997, a quarter of Americans are Internet users.

Vocabulary: Internet Service Provider (ISP), URL, 'address', HTML, 'pages', hypertext.

II. Slightly more advanced questions: How to get a computer for your parish, how (exactly) to set up a parish website; who is going to 'maintain' it?

I've discovered that it's much easier than people think to run a church website ('building' on is a different matter – a pro does need to be hired for that, and then kept on a short leash). Once it's up, it serves four functions, in this order of importance.

1. It offers a name and address to anyone trawling through the web looking for a local church. *Not* having a site is becoming a very loud and sinister sort of silence – it suggests not wanting new arrivals. Even a very simple one-page 'billboard', costing nothing, taking an hour to put up, is a lot better than nothing.

2. Secondly, it is a way of enticing people to come to our church. As people spend more and more time 'in' cyberspace, the chances of someone just bumping into your site become significant, so it matters a good deal if what

that casual surfer sees draws him in. This is the hard bit: we have to decide exactly what it is we want to say about ourselves in the violent visual form of a homepage. And then we have to make him want to explore the other parts of the site and finally turn up on Sunday morning.

3. Thirdly, there is, I think, a lot of value in people looking at parish websites even if they don't visit in the flesh. We have about 850 visitors a day, of whom, of course, we only see a tiny fraction (although that still means we see an internet-catch once every few weeks). Those thousands, many of them it seems regulars, are a sort of cyber-congregation, an unseen cloud of witnesses; and we have to take them seriously. It would be much better if they came to Mass, but failing that, skimming through our site may be their one religious activity.

4. Fourthly, it's a way for the congregation (and the other local parishes) to keep abreast of things. We put our parish magazine – so as it is – on-line, and it gets far more hits than we print hardcopies.

III. Profound and dazzling questions: How much time and money will this take? What should (and what shouldn't) go on a website? What is web-design, and where do we go to get it?

