**WYOMING WANDERINGS – January/February 2016**

**LET’S GET VISIBLE: Church Websites**

“Where is that church, anyway?” Oh the joys of being a new, often directionally-challenged, District Superintendent! Your car, of course, takes you to your church almost on instinct. But for those of us visiting, our cars aren’t as smart. In a recent interview, Pastor Jim Barth noted that when he arrived at Powell the patrons of a nearby coffee shop did not know where his church was even though it was only 3 blocks away on the same street! (The entire interview is [**HERE**](file:///C:\Users\jenita\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\86U19DU8\HERE).)

In this strange, new, religious landscape we find ourselves, one challenge we face is the ***invisibility*** of mainline churches. People’s eyes slide right past our churches like the eyes of London muggles slip past The Leaky Cauldron (a Harry Potter reference for fans out there!). We can no longer assume our neighbors will know *anything* about our church.

How can we make our congregations more visible within the communities we serve? One important learning from the *Fresh Expressions* movement is that more and more people organize their social lives around **networks instead of neighborhoods**.[[1]](#endnote-1) Simply stated, your congregation won’t be visible to your neighbors – even your next door neighbors – unless you connect with their networks. So how do we connect with our neighbors’ networks? Start with the network most of us are already part of: the internet! **Every church needs a good website**. No exceptions. Two decades ago, people learned the most basic information about our churches through the yellow pages. A decade ago, street signs were important. Today, people will find out about your congregation most often through your webpage.

Do me a favor: “Google” your church – open your web browser, type in google.com, and then type ‘Methodist Church’ and your town and state). What showed up in the top 10 sites? If it wasn’t your church’s webpage, then you have some work to do. If your church doesn’t have a webpage, you really have some work to do. Want some good news? Managing a website often no longer requires any computer skills beyond word-processing. There are even some inexpensive, even free, options for small churches with little or no money to spend on a website. Check out weebly.com or wix.com. Registering a domain name for your church (e.g. fumccasper.com) is usually only a few dollars a year – well worth the expense. If nothing else, at least create a Facebook page for your church. It’s free and easy.

While you are working on your congregation’s web presence, here are a few pointers:

1. Three questions must be answered easily and quickly by your website or Facebook page. Who are you? Where are you? When do you worship? This information should be on the front page or within one easily identified click away.
2. Keep the website simple and keep it current. Don’t put anything on your website you are not willing to update regularly.
3. Websites should be **first** for our guests and then for our members. Websites are public documents and should not be cluttered with insider information.

Want more advice on creating a great church website? Check out Thom Rainer’s advice [**HERE**](http://thomrainer.com/2016/01/eight-things-your-church-website-must-have). Do you have questions about a church’s web presence? [**Email them to me.**](mailto:jrainwater@rmcumc.com?subject=Questions%20about%20church%20websites)

As I write this, Easter is about eight weeks away – one of those special times when people whose eyes usually slide right by our church actually go looking for a church. Eight weeks is plenty of time to become a bit more visible to your neighbors.

Shalom,  
Jeff Rainwater, Wyoming District Superintendent

January 29, 2016

1. *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions in a Changing Context*, Seabury Books, New York: 2009, pp.4-7, 62-67. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)